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Mrs. Sherman's Summer

by Marjorie Fischer

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To

Marion E. Kenworthy

MRS. SHERMAN'S SUMMER

1

ALTHOUGH THE big house on Long Island was more than a mile from the beach, the sea was always in the air. In early morning, the whole place, house, lawn, trees, privet hedge, were awash with water as if at the bottom of a sea pool; the hydrangeas, in a ring within the circle of the drive, were bent to the grass under the weight of the dew and the salt-filled air. The sky was milky, low, brooding; light came slowly, from everywhere and nowhere.

The milk wagon approached the back porch, wheels rattling, horse's hoofs creaking over the gravel. "Easy there," whispered the milkman. He laid down the reins, reached back into the wagon and took out the white holder with the three quarts of Walker Gordon milk he delivered daily, and the six quarts of Grade A and two pints of cream because it was Friday. The horse stood as if sleeping, but in the stable Carrots, the trotter, snorted, stamped on the floor of his box-stall, and the milkman's horse moved sideways within his shafts and neighed an answer. A shade scratched the screen of an upper window, and a man's voice said, "Quiet, quiet! You'll disturb the old lady."

Gisela, called the Holy Cook by the children, returning from five-o'clock Mass, ran across the wet lawn, finger to her lips, saying, "*Ruhig!* Mrs. Sherman sleeps yet."

The milkman winked at Gisela, climbed into his wagon, clucked softly at his horse and drove away. Gisela went into

her kitchen, closing the screen door easy behind her. Now from the kitchen came the rattle of water hitting a pan, the rusty grate of the coffee-mill, the vigorous smell of freshly ground coffee.

The mist thinned, evaporated, the colors of the grass, trees, flowers, were released into the singing morning. The closed trumpets of the morning-glories, twining over strings at the porch sides, swung toward the rising sun, and honeysuckle scented the air. A robin whirred from a bush, hopped, staccato, over the lawn, jerked his head up, down, froze to stillness as he watched his breakfast emerge, pulled, pulled at the worm. *Mutter*, the cat, stole like a shadow without a body towards the robin and then turned away, not liking the dew on her paws. Birds cheeped, flew in small patterns from branch to branch, and a thin blue flame rose on every hand, the crickets tuning up for the day.

The paper boy rode his bicycle around the drive and flung a folded *New York Times* to the doormat. Pedaling away, he passed so close to Mr. Beck, the hairdresser, that Mr. Beck had to step back hastily, and the green-tinged hydrangea blossoms spattered dew against the cuffs of his trousers. Mr. Beck frowned, and then, pale, elegant, entered the house, hung his hat on the combination umbrella hat and coat rack which climbed the wall like an untended vine, and went upstairs. He walked down the hall past a number of closed doors, stopped at one, and knocked.

"Beck?" said the old lady. "Come in."

Mr. Beck entered, set his heels together and bowed into the mirror to Mrs. Sherman, who sat before her bureau waiting for him.

"*Na, wie geht's?*" said the old lady. She took a final sip of coffee, and set the cup down, clack!, in the saucer; her hands always trembled a little, but Mr. Beck knew better than to pay any attention to that. Mrs. Adelaide Sherman, seventy-one years old this summer of 1911, had a massive repose and strength which heartened the hairdresser each morning for his rounds with the ladies, for Life, he thought with vague Russian

melancholy. He began to brush out the old lady's thick black hair, touched with gray, and waited for her to speak first.

"How is Mrs. Beck?" she asked. "Headache better?"

"Much better, thank you," said Mr. Beck, and he told her what the doctor had said, his Russian accent blending with the old lady's German accent in a cosmopolitan duet.

"Doctors are all idiots," said Mrs. Sherman, who also told this to the doctors. She steadied herself against the brushing, hands grasping the edge of the bureau; she wore two rings, the broad gold wedding band never removed in fifty-three years, and the black pearl solitaire made from one of her husband's stickpins after his death ten years before. "That will do, now, Beck," said the old lady. "Today's Friday."

"Ah, baking," said Mr. Beck.

"You don't think I'd leave it to that devil," said Mrs. Sherman, referring to the Holy Cook. "Through the week it's all right, we don't have so many, just eighteen for dinner counting the kitchen."

Mr. Beck nodded; he had been dressing Mrs. Sherman's hair for many years, and he knew she was not making a joke.

Steps crunched on the graveled drive below, and Mrs. Sherman heaved from her chair. Two of her sons-in-law appeared, looked to a top-floor window and waved their straw sailor-hats. Mrs. Sherman waited until another, younger man dashed down the drive.

"Larry," called Mrs. Sherman, "should I expect you for dinner?"

"No, ma," called the young man, and he smiled over his shoulder as he ran towards the sound of a trolley whanging along somewhere out of sight. "I've got a date in town tonight. So long."

"I know those dates," said Mrs. Sherman, speaking to herself. She went back to her chair, and Mr. Beck parted her hair, respectfully allowing the front section to drop over her face. "Careful, my glasses!" said the old lady. "He could have stopped in to see me before he left."

Mr. Beck knew that this was a moment to be careful of more

than glasses: Larry was the youngest, the dearly beloved of the old lady.

"Mr. Lawrence is a fine-looking young fellow," he said.

"He bums too much," said Mrs. Sherman.

Mr. Beck rolled up the pompadour from Mrs. Sherman's face and saw that she was smiling. Mr. Beck went on to admire Larry's taste in clothes, nothing ever showy but always well-made, fitted, and elegant, and Mrs. Sherman, not displeased, answered that Larry was too extravagant and ought to have more sense.

"You've got wonderful sons," said Mr. Beck. He pointed his comb at a bank of photographs behind the silver toilet set on the bureau. "A wonderful family. Most of them spending every summer here with you."

"Why shouldn't they?" said Mrs. Sherman.

"I just meant everybody says the Shermans have more family feeling than any—"

"Who says?" said Mrs. Sherman. "Beck, I won't have you gossiping."

"Oh, madam!" said Mr. Beck. "I never." He put another hairpin into the cluster of puffs behind the pompadour.

"That'll do, that'll do!" said the old lady. She began to laugh. "You think I'm trying to catch a man? Nine children are enough. Too many."

Beck laughed with her, and patted the edifice he had built. "There!" he said. "See you tomorrow, Mrs. Sherman." He went out, past the closed door next to Mrs. Sherman's room, slowing his steps without meaning to; true enough, he didn't gossip, but he couldn't stop his clients, and more than one had asked him if he ever caught a glimpse of Belle Hoffman. She was supposed not to have left her room all summer, not since she had started suit for divorce. Belle's door stayed shut, and Mr. Beck went on, trying not to look through the other doorways, all open now, for in each bedroom stood a lady dressing, one in her pink glove-silk union-suit, one buckling on her corset, another leaning stiffly within her laced brocade corset to roll on a white silk stocking. This one glanced up and saw him,

pulled her kimono about her and smiled. Claudia Nathan reached for her glasses and clipped them before her blue-gray eyes.

"Hello, Mr. Beck," she said. The ladies all down the hall said Oh!, reached for their glasses, and one of them said, "Beck doesn't care, he's used to this." Mrs. Sherman came into the hall and roared, "Shame on you!"

The sisters laughed, and Mr. Beck escaped down the stairs. A voice followed him: "I thought it was all right, ma. The men left long ago."

"It's not all right," said Mrs. Sherman. "How often must I tell you?"

The old lady returned to her room, and, not bothering to shut her own door, took off her kimono and put on a white linen dress. She trod down the hall, pinning her watch to her bosom by its fleur-de-lis pin, meeting the waitress with a breakfast tray for Belle. Mrs. Sherman watched while the maid knocked and the door was opened just far enough to take in the tray and shut again; she addressed her daughters.

"The way Belle behaves you'd think she was committing murder instead of just getting a divorce from that bum," said the old lady. "*Verrückt!*" She went downstairs to the kitchen where the colored chauffeur, Morton, rose to his feet, and Gisela turned from the stove.

"Morning, Mis' Sherman," said Morton, and the old lady put her hand on his arm and told him to sit down, sit down, and finish his breakfast. But Morton stood until Mrs. Sherman had given orders for lunch and dinner, and told Morton to have the machine at the house by eleven. On her way out, she turned.

"Gisela," she said, "you can make apple flitters for dessert. The kids like them."

She went into the servants' dining room where everything she needed for her Friday baking was set out on the oilcloth-covered table; she tied on a big apron and began to mix dough for strudel. Mrs. Sherman's Friday baking was all that remained of any ritual she had ever followed, although, because

ing, and the little girls ran after him, whirled about, scrambled up the steps.

"Granma, could we—"

"Sh-h-h," said Minnie, humbly, considerately, "don't you see I'm reading to your grandmother? You don't want to disturb her—"

"Get my bag, you kids," said Mrs. Sherman, shutting up Minnie. "On the hall table."

Whang, bang, went the screen door, whang, bang, again, and Babs and Judy came back with the big black old lady bag, and Granma fished out a handful of change for them.

Minnie rattled the paper and read on, her voice white with hate—she'd only been trying to do the right thing, but what thanks did you get?—and Mrs. Sherman half listened, watching the kids.

Babs hung back, shaken with sadness and delight in the sad little monkey, all dressed up in his Sunday clothes, winding up and down his chain from hurdy-gurdy to hurdy-gurdy man's shoulder. Judy danced, black curls bobbing, pressing pennies into the monkey's hand. Babs moved forward to the little old monkey, and could not bear to touch his hand; she dropped a penny into the tiny red cap. Beanie chased in circles about his charges—was this safe, there was a wild smell in the air—barking, barking.

How could ma hear in all the racket, Minnie wondered, turning a page; sometimes she noticed what she read of the engagements and marriages, the deaths. "Countersuit Filed," she read to her mother. "A countersuit for a separation was filed yesterday by Seth Hoffman—" Oh! thought Minnie, coming out of her trance, I can't read this to mama, I shouldn't, it'll upset her. But somehow she was reading on. "—against his wife, Mrs. Belle Sherman Hoffman, who is suing him for a divorce. He charged—"

Minnie gave her mother a frightened glance and was silent. *Funiculi, funicula, funiculi,* rose from the hurdy-gurdy, and the little girls sang along with it. Mrs. Sherman took in what she had just heard. She stopped rocking.

"Well?" she said.

"It's nothing, ma. Just a report," said Minnie, but she knew her mother would make her finish, and serve Belle right.

"Go on!"

Faster and faster Minnie read the brief item about her sister, whose implications suggested there was more to the countersuit than the *Times* had reported, that Mr. Hoffman claimed he had caught his wife in the pantry kissing Mr. Alexander Levy, a friend of the family.

The old lady rose so rapidly that her chair screeched under her.

"Belle," she shouted. "Come down here." She paused to order the hurdy-gurdy man to stop that damn racket this minute, and strode into the house.

Minnie told the kids, deserted at the entrance, to go and play, this was nothing for them, and she crept in, waiting very still by the twisted hatrack, holding the *Times*.

"Belle!" shouted the old lady, standing four-square in the hall.

"I'm coming as fast as I can, ma. What's the rush, all of a sudden?"

From her shadowy corner, Minnie watched her beautiful sister come to the head of the stairs, and she worked her fingers nervously.

Unsuspecting, Belle started down, trailing the ruffles of her white negligee behind her. She got no more than halfway when her mother grabbed the newspaper from Minnie and searched wildly for the piece about Belle. But she had never learned to read English, and was ashamed of it, and her fury rose; she flung the paper to the floor. Minnie darted forward and took the *Times* up to Belle, who read while Mrs. Sherman waited in an accelerating silence. Belle's creamy skin flushed, she broke into tears.

"Oh!" cried Belle. "It's not true."

Even crying she was beautiful, Minnie thought, and such jealousy possessed her that she began to murmur how sorry she was, she hadn't meant, hadn't realized—

"You had to read that to ma," sobbed Belle. "Always making trouble. There's not a word of truth in it." And she turned to her sisters, Claudie and Emma, leaning over the upstairs banister, to her mother and Minnie below, denying, denying everything.

"Shut up," said Mrs. Sherman.

"Everybody'll see it," wept Belle.

"What did you expect?" said Mrs. Sherman. "You always were dumb." She delivered the next statement fortissimo. "You had to pick the pantry where you'd surely be caught." She charged straight at Minnie, who dodged, took her bonnet off the hatrack, tied the ribbons hard and crooked under her chin, and added the coda. "Belle, I'm disgusted with you. Go on upstairs. I don't want to see you again."

The old lady banged out of the side-door on to the porte-cochere, where Morton waited beside the auto. She climbed in, sank, plop! into the seat, and announced to Morton, and it floated to her daughters within, that anyone who had children was an idiot.

2

"THE OLD lady's way off. What's wrong?" Carl Nathan asked his wife while he washed up for dinner.

"Later," said Claudie, drying her hands. She nodded at Babs, perched on the high rim of the bathtub. Babs hung around her father, her refuge among all the Shermans, as much as she could. Barbara's the image of her father, the family said, you'd never take her for a Sherman; she had Carl's eyes, large, gray-green, with long sad lids, she had the thin face, olive skin, long thin nose, the cast of countenance that might have been Spanish or French, Mediterranean surely, and as surely Jewish. Claudie's shoulder twitched as she looked from her daughter to her husband. She stood behind Carl to see herself in the mirror, and her uneven eyes, charming and soft behind her glasses, smiled at what she saw. Claudie's face was oval, her nose turned up—Claudie looked like the family.

"Barbara, did you take your Maltine?" she asked.

"Not yet, phooey," said Babs.

"I don't admire your language in the least," said her mother. "Go on, now, tell Miss Wilson you're to take your tonic."

Babs looked to her father, who winked at her.

"That's your mother's department," said Carl. "Beat it, now."

Babs beat it, very, very slowly.

Minnie called up that dinner was ready, and the Nathans

went downstairs before Carl could find out what was wrong. Dinner was eaten in silence; they sat like mourners at the feast in the long dining room lit by a stained-glass bowl hung low over the table. The walls were paneled in dark wood, above which a hairy red wallpaper soaked up the light from the side-brackets. Opposite Carl sat Emma Jacobson, perhaps his least favorite sister-in-law, her gray head shaking a little more than usual, her lips set. Carl's private name for her was Sitting Bull, the use of which, to his wife only, sometimes eased his feelings about her. Now she seemed to be addressing him, but Carl could not hear her.

"Beg pardon?" said Carl, in a normal tone, God damn it, wondering why he let Claudie talk him into living here each summer.

"The rolls," whispered Emma. "Pass the rolls, please."

Carl passed the rolls. A man works hard all day in the hot city, thought Carl, and this is what he gets when he comes home: a fine thing.

Nobody ever left the table before the old lady rose, and she took her time about it this evening; the clock on the sideboard, upon which a bronze Moses leaned holding the tablets of the law, had struck half-past eight before Mrs. Sherman flung her napkin on the tablecloth. Carl got up to pull back her chair, and the old lady walked out to the porch with her daughters fleeing after her.

"What gives?" Carl asked Theo Green, Minnie's husband.

Theo chuckled, sucked at a back tooth, and went to select a cigar from the humidor on the sideboard.

"Minnie hasn't opened her mouth," said Theo.

He clipped the end from his cigar and sniffed deeply along its length. Now the cigar, thought Carl, who did not smoke, now the cigar to go out and be re-lit until the house smelled like McGurk's-on-the-Bowery. He did not dislike his brother-in-law, a big handsome man, thick hair turning gray, face unmarked by thought: Theo was a lightweight, but he meant well.

"Going up?" asked Carl, taking the answer for granted. Every evening after dinner the two men went to the top floor to kiss

their kids good night. Theo walked down the hall to the room his only child, Judy, shared with Babs and their governess, and Carl stopped off to see his son. Lena, the nurse, sat reading under a lamp; she whispered, "He's asleep," and Carl looked down at Davie, flat on his stomach, face pressed sideways on the pillow, sleeping hard. He touched Davie's yellow hair in spite of a warning rustle from the nurse and went on to see Babs.

"Sit here, father," said Babs, punching the mattress where her legs showed under the sheet. Her dark hair had been done up in rags, and the fat curls bobbled as she spoke.

"Well, paleface," said Carl, sitting down on the bed, "were you good today?"

"*We* were," said Judy, from her bed jammed next to Babs'. The Shermans said, taking the credit, that Judy was going to be a beauty, but she looked like her father and was already a beauty, with masses of dark hair that did not need putting up to curl round the baton on the bureau, great brown eyes, and an elegance of carriage strange in a little girl. Judy was always well-groomed, Babs always a bit crushed and rumpled as if she had been lying down somewhere to read. Right now her father moved and pulled an open copy of *The Water-Babies* from under the folded blanket at the foot of the bed.

"Slob," he said. "How often do you have to be told?"

"Oh, father!" said Babs.

"Why can't you learn to be neat like Judy?" said Carl.

But she couldn't; and anyway, the cousins loved each other, and usually Babs could hold off her wild jealousy when Judy's looks were discussed and hers were not. Babs knew that she looked like her father, and that seemed to be hard luck, even her father said so.

"Listen, papa, listen, Uncle Carl," said Judy, "I said *we* were good." She looked at Babs, and they giggled.

"Listen, father," said Babs, "well—uh—granma got furious at Aunt Belle, something about something in the paper—"

"In the paper? Nonsense," said Theo. The Shermans never got in the paper unless they were being married or had died.

"It was, too," said Judy. "What *was* it? We couldn't find the paper afterwards, they must have hidden it."

"You're imagining things," said Theo, but he raised his eyebrows at Carl, questioning him. Carl shook his head; he'd brought the *Times* home with him to finish tonight. Babs and Judy missed none of this exchange, and Judy grabbed her father's arm.

"We are not imagining," she said. "Aunt Belle cried like everything. She kept saying it wasn't true."

"What wasn't true?" asked Babs. "That's what we want to know."

"That'll do now," said Carl. "The sandman's coming. Give me a big hug and a kiss."

Babs hurled herself at her father, dragging the sheet with her, and her father said, "Here, here, now, take it easy," and kissed her cheek. "Now the other cheek," cried Babs, sticking like court plaster, and got what she asked for.

The men extricated themselves and went downstairs to Carl's room. Here they read the item about Belle and Alexander Levy. Theo chuckled.

"Seth is a fourteen-carat stinker," said Carl, shocked.

"That's nothing new, is it?" said Theo.

Carl read the report again, and looked at the unmoved Theo.

"You going to sit on the porch a while?" asked Carl. "The old lady might like it."

"Not me," said Theo. "Dinner was bad enough." He went to his room and settled himself beside a lamp with one of his Western magazines. He re-lit his cigar, opened to the Complete Novelette, and by the time Carl passed his door he was at the Bar-X Ranch, where a clean fine unimportant girl waved him off to ride in search of rustlers.

Carl knocked at Belle's door.

"Go away," said Belle, tearful, but Carl knocked again.

"It's Carl," he said.

Belle opened the door a crack.

"Carl, it's not true," she said, beginning to cry again. "There's not a word of truth in it."

"I believe you," said Carl, and he did; now if it had been Flora—but Flora, recently widowed, had sailed for Europe last month, a fountain of crape. "You listen to me, Belle, by next week it'll all be forgotten." Over Belle's shoulder he saw her untouched supper tray. "Try to eat a little something."

"I couldn't swallow a mouthful," said Belle.

"Try," said Carl. "Take a tip from me, don't let it get you."

He moved away and Belle shut the door; she opened it again and said, "Carl, you're a real human being."

"Forget it," said Carl, pleased. Overhead, he heard a small noise and he called, "Get to bed, you kids. I'm not fooling." He made a racket on the stairs as if he were about to run up, and the little girls laughed and ran to their room.

3

AN HOUR passed slowly on the porch, in the warm dark. The only light came dimly from a street lamp beyond the hedge, its yellow beams broken and whitened by clouds of moths. Fireflies in the trees and grass seemed to click on and off in time to the katydids' sharp eternal indecisions. Mrs. Sherman's chair rocked slowly, stopped.

"I'm going to bed," she announced.

"Night, ma," murmured her daughters.

The four left on the porch sat on, and from the Ryan house next door they heard a clatter on the steps, and then the ghost of a straw skimmer sailed by above the hedge.

"Those Ryan boys," said Minnie, as if talking straight ahead to the closed morning-glories and not at all to her sister Emma. "Going to be heartbreakers, all right." She paused, and tapped her fingers on the arm of her chair. "When will Susan be home, Emma?"

The Ryan boys spent a lot of time hanging around with Emma's daughter, Susan. Carl Nathan straightened in his chair and was about to speak, but Claudie gave him a tiny nod only a husband would have noticed. The nod meant don't talk, and Claudie was right; Emma needed no protection, she had not even registered Minnie's dig.

"Susan gets home Monday in time for lunch," she said. "The

Ryans are going to have trouble with those boys. Mrs. can't control them at all. Anyone want a glass of sarsaparilla?"

No one wanted any sarsaparilla, and said so. Minnie went on tapping. She said, low:

"Alec Levy phoned Belle this morning. Emma, you and Claudie were at the beach. I happened to answer."

"I'll bet you happened to answer," said Claudie.

Minnie ignored this, and waited for questions. None came.

"Belle wouldn't talk to him," she said. "She told me she had nothing to say to him."

"Do you think he'll show up for Sunday dinner?" asked Emma. Alexander Levy came out almost every Sunday; he called Mrs. Sherman mama.

"Why shouldn't he?" said Carl. "Only sensible thing to do. You don't dignify a story like that by paying any attention to it."

"I was just asking," said Emma. She slapped at her arm. "These mosquitoes! Did Joe call?"

At this mention of Joseph Sherman, head of the brokerage house of Sherman and Company, member of the New York Stock Exchange and one of Adelaide Sherman's four sons, the silence on the porch, though brief, became charged and electric.

"Well, of course Joe called!" said Claudie violently. "As if he didn't call every day."

"I can see nothing wrong in my question," said Emma, and when, thought Carl, had Sitting Bull last seen anything wrong in her words or actions. She went straight on: "Do you think he said anything about Belle and Alec?"

"No, I don't think he said anything," said Claudie. "Anyway, why don't you ask Minnie? She's the one that always happens to speak to him."

"Why, Claudie—" said Minnie. Her tone was reasonable. "Someone had to answer. It isn't as if ma ever talked on the phone. Joe never mentioned Belle. He must have seen the story. I'm sure he understands Belle couldn't help what Seth claimed. Maybe I could try to explain to him—"

"Don't you start with Joe," said Claudie. "Belle's got enough to contend with."

"If that's your attitude," said Minnie, "I'm not going to stay here. Good night."

She went into the house and they heard her going softly up the stairs.

"Minnie!" said Emma.

"Sh," said Claudie, "you know how she listens. I bet she reported the whole scene this morning to Joe."

Emma and Carl did not disagree with her.

Minnie went to her room and called Theo back from the far prairie. She began to tell him all about Belle while she unpinned her nest of puffs and laid it on the bureau, and she was still telling him when she got into the brass double bed. Theo listened, or seemed to listen, his mouth pursed into shapes of shock or sympathy, but once Minnie said, "I don't think you've heard a word I've been saying," when she saw his eyes wander along the latticed green-and-white wallpaper; how easily lattices could become fences, the wavy spot near the ceiling a mountain range. At any rate, when Minnie asked Theo if he was going to read all night, for heavens' sakes, he said just a while longer, and right away he was back in the saddle, cool as a cucumber though the cattle were preparing to stampede.

Emma Jacobson had letters to write before she went to sleep. Strictly corseted, upright in body as in soul, she sat at the desk in her bedroom and uncapped the ink bottle. Then she drew a sheet of writing paper from the desk drawer and wrote her husband an account of *l'affaire Belle* so self-righteous, so poisonous it might have done him a harm if he had not, after all these years, developed immunity. As she wrote, her ears were alert for sounds from the back porch where the maids were always fooling with Morton, for her young brother Larry who might come in early once in a way, for voices, whispers, sighs: Emma took an interest in things. She concluded her letter with a ritual "Love, Emma," and addressed the envelope. She drew her tongue along the flap, sealed it, and thumped her closed hand on it. She opened the desk drawer again to get a stamp,

and found none. She pulled the drawer out further, to where Flora had thrust a box of stationery with a half-inch-wide black border. The box was so full that the cover barely fitted down over the top edge. Emma, always honorable, had not so much as touched this box since moving into Flora's room.

Flora's room, thought Emma now; don't make me laugh, Flora's room! Flora gets away with murder, giving up her room to me "while she's away," as if she were ever anything else, except maybe for a couple of weeks so everything'll look all right. Emma drew out the box of her widowed sister's mourning stationery and took off the lid to look for a stamp. The sheets of note paper popped up as if pushed from beneath, and Emma slid them off still looking for a stamp, but what she found was a higgledy-piggledy collection of notes, postcards, snapshots, a newspaper clipping—anyone can read the papers, thought Emma, reading—which was the review of a cellist's recital in San Francisco; written across the top in heavy blue ink was a message which began Darling Flora after which Emma read no more. Her hand shook as she shoved the whole mess far back out of sight and shut the drawer.

She undressed and made ready for the night, scrubbing her face with Pear's Soap, brushing her teeth fifteen strokes right round, inside and out, braiding her hair in a tight queue. Then she sat down at the desk again and began to write to Flora. Flora had no family feeling, whatever she claimed to feel, but she ought to know about Belle, and Emma wrote on dutifully. Getting ahead of herself, she wondered if she should write to Simon, too. Si, the oldest but it seemed to Emma the giddiest of the Sherman children, her eight brothers and sisters, did not even pretend, like Flora, to have a room here; he simply went to Carlsbad every summer for the cure, and used a cubbyhole on the top floor when he returned. He ought to know, too, thought Emma, but she was tired now, so she finished the letter to Flora and got into bed and tried to sleep. Instead she began to tell her worries like beads, slipping past Susan, her fifteen-year-old daughter, past her husband, in Salt Lake City on a business trip, fastening to plans for her house in town, that house al-

ways swept and polished, prepared for the feast never spread for her. She pulled a summer blanket over her and closed her eyes, dozing off but still, somehow, listening for the lives that were not hers.

Carl Nathan, reading the *Review of Reviews* in bed, looked over to the bathroom, where he heard a bottle set down. The bathroom was full of Claudie's bottles, hair tonic, eye drops, triple bromide, cascara, Lysol—medicines for every area of her body, though she was never ill. The Nathans were the only ones with a bathroom to themselves; Claudie knew very well that Carl would not stay here in the summers without this modicum of privacy. Now she came out of that bathroom. "Finally!" said Carl. He watched her punch the pillows and settle back into her bed. Claudie was the youngest of the sisters, thirty, but she never told her age, and she looked younger. Carl smiled to himself when she picked a book from the stack on the table between them; Claudie read the damndest things, the Apocrypha this time, for a course she was planning to take next winter. She felt her husband watching her, and the light caught her glasses as she looked up.

"Stop that, Carl," she said.

"Selah," said Carl.

Claudie frowned and then she laughed.

"Carl," she said a minute later.

Carl laid his magazine face down on his knees.

"What is it this time?"

"Carl, if you're going to take that attitude I can't talk to you."

"No, tell me," said Carl, adding up the blue cabbage roses on the wallpaper.

"Just that you haven't said anything lately about moving the factory and office and everything."

Carl checked his addition. Then he spoke judiciously.

"It's going to take money, Claudie."

"Well?" said Claudie.

Carl explained, or tried to, that these things were not so

simple. Moving his business, the manufacture of ladies' coats and suits, which had outgrown its present loft, would be a heavy expense—here the cabbage roses became numbers intricately entwined—and he was planning to arrange a loan from the bank in the near future. He became aware of a thick silence, and saw his wife pushing her wedding ring on and off her finger, never a good sign.

"What's wrong with that?" he asked, surprised.

"Really, Carl, sometimes I don't understand you at all."

"Now what?" asked Carl, somewhat distracted because in a third summing-up of the roses he had come to an unexpected and charming total, Claudie's white batiste petticoat, frills run through with pink ribbon, heaped on a chair.

"How can you consider going anywhere for a loan except to Joe?"

"Why Joe?" He looked at Claudie, pretty and serious, and thought with pleasure that no women, Claudie least of all, understood business.

"You know how Joe feels about the family," said Claudie.

"I know he feels he can run everybody," said Carl. "The less I have to do with your brother the better."

"You've always been unreasonable about Joe," said Claudie. "I'm thinking of Barbara and Davie."

"I've heard that argument before," said Carl. "O.K., they stand to inherit money from him. That says if he doesn't go broke, or get sore, or the kids don't breathe wrong some day."

Claudie pulled her wedding ring right off her finger; she said nothing.

"I'll consider getting the loan from Joe," said Carl.

Claudie jammed the wedding ring back on. "Well, I should hope so!" she said.

"Claudie—"

But she was reading again, and Carl took up the *Review of Reviews.*

In the Greens' bedroom next door, a small room which Minnie hated because she felt it made her place in the family

so clear, Minnie told Theo to put away that magazine and come to bed. Theo did so cheerfully, turning off the light before Minnie pressed against him. Her husband, Minnie did not let herself think, had lost her money—the money she had made Joe give Theo, using every trick in her bag to get it—the first year they were married; they lived the year around with Mrs. Sherman on Joe's bounty, and all Theo's salvaged novelty business paid for was Judy's schooling and the extras and a small amount for board. Minnie loved Theo, the big handsome man. Had he—this thought almost broke loose—had he married the Sherman money, accepting her into the bargain? She pressed closer. Theo chuckled and put his arms around her; he had married Minnie for affection and with affection. He took over his marital duties cheerfully, fresh from the far West.

Shut in her room, Belle lay sleeping, round arms over the linen sheet, a ruffle of lace, a bow of ribbon fallen from her white shoulder, her long fine hands relaxed. Her hair was caught into waves with tortoise-shell combs and tied with a bit of blue malines. Her face was smooth, she breathed evenly, and no one, not even Belle, could have told what she was dreaming, or what company she kept in her dreams.

The house was still when Larry came home. He tiptoed under the hi-lo bulb in the hall, up the stairs, past the line of light under the Nathans' door. He carried a manila envelope, holding it most preciously away from his side. A little fuddled with wine, he set the envelope down on his bureau and undressed, throwing his clothes on the wicker chair by the bed. Then he found his watch-chain, fanned out the keys on their ring, and unlocked the large, japanned box under the window. He set the envelope inside, locked the box soberly, and lay down. He was so tired that perhaps he would not sleep, and he must be up early to get to Wall Street. Joe would have been waiting there long before him, reading the papers in the empty office. A headache gathered like a thundercloud behind Larry's eyes.

He did not sleep, and the headache thickened. After a while

his door was opened softly.

"Ma?" said Larry.

"Sh-h-h, darling. I heated you some milk," said the old lady.

He might have been angry if he had not been so tired. He drank the milk and handed the glass back to his mother, a solid shadow at his side in the darkness, and then he turned away and slept before she left the room.

The Nathans' light still burned.

"It's late," said Carl. "That must have been Larry just now."

Claudie yawned and caught her husband's eye on her.

"Darling—" said Carl.

"I want a glass of water," said Claudie. "Should I go?"

"That means me," said Carl, getting out of bed.

Claudie drank the water, and Carl stood beside her waiting to turn out the light.

"Damn it," she said, "now I have to go to the bathroom."

"That I can't do for you," said Carl.

She laughed, but came back looking sulky when she saw Carl in her bed.

"Oh, Carl, I'm tired," she said.

"Don't talk so much," said Carl, and Claudie took off her glasses and looked at him defenseless. She lay down with him and let him have his way, and what he was doing was a lonely business until, in spite of herself, she caught fire from him.

In spite of herself, for when he stayed beside her, kissing her shoulder and asking without words for some return of tenderness, she drew away.

"I can't sleep like this," said Claudie, and Carl went to his own bed shamed, somehow, as Claudie meant him to be. Then Claudie fell asleep and Carl lay wakeful; his eyes, adjusted to the dark, made out the cabbage roses on the wall, enormous now as the figures in Joe Sherman's ledgers.

4

Babs and Judy had been shooed from the tennis court where their fathers were playing doubles with Alec Levy and one of the Ryan boys.

"Is Mr. Levy anything to us?" Babs asked.

"I don't think so," said Judy.

"He calls granma mama," said Babs.

"So does everybody," said Judy.

They looked back at this possible relative, a tall man with light brown hair and moustache who moved over the court like a ballroom dancer.

"I guess he's nothing," said Babs. "Oh, Judy! He's Alexander Levy. The one who got caught kissing Aunt Belle. Remember?"

Judy remembered because they had spent most of one morning tracking down the *Times*, finding it at last lining a garbage can under a horrid mass of garbage which had not kept them from the pursuit of knowledge. Now they stopped and took a good stare at Alec Levy; he looked just the way he did every Sunday, though.

"What'll we do now?" said Babs.

"We could play croquet," said Judy, immaculate in white buckskin shoes and pink handkerchief-linen dress. "That wouldn't muss us up."

"Oh, muss!" said Babs. She was dressed exactly like Judy,

except that she had stepped into a puddle near the trickling garden hose and sat too hard on the grass. "All right, croquet."

"Betcha beatcha," said Judy.

"Betcha," said Babs. This was the correct answer, and concealed the fact that Babs didn't care a hoot either way. Peculiar, that's what the aunts said Babs was, an awful condition, one Babs tried passionately to hide.

They walked over the lawn and waved to Morton, who was turning the ice-cream freezer. Morton wore a clean white undershirt and the green pants of his uniform; the freezer was giving back as good as it got, and Morton's brown arms glistened in the sunlight. He was talking to Uncle Larry.

"What can he keep in that box, Babs?" asked Judy, who tried the lid of Larry's japanned box every day, on the off-chance that he might have forgotten to lock it.

"Who cares?" said Babs. She occasionally went through her mother's bureau drawers, but had no interest whatever in Larry's box. She added, at random, "Ducats, Spanish gold, the King's ankus. It's guarded by a blind hooded cobra. A white cobra." She tripped over a wicket.

"*Hans-guck-in-die-Luft!*" said Babs' mother from a window. "Barbara, I want you to come in and take your Maltine."

"Oh, mother! I took it," said Babs, and fled, leaving Judy to play a hard game of croquet against herself.

Babs went to the back porch, but Gisela glared at her through the tangled odors of dinner cooking and ordered her to stay out from underfoot. The front porch had Aunt Emma and Aunt Minnie on it, and maybe a few Sunday visitors besides, rocking and talking, so Babs got into the house through the side door which led into the children's dining room. Among other things, Babs hated to be a child and have to eat here; she also hated Sundays in the country.

She walked lightly, as if that could make her invisible. One of the parlors, the one she liked, with faded cretonne full of roses at the windows and on the wicker furniture, was empty. Babs darted inside. Better and better! The funny-papers lay on the glass-topped table.

This was not an ideal set-up: the double doors to the hall were open, and shutting them would be an invitation to every passer-by. But it was good for a Sunday. A big armchair was half hidden in a corner, and if the funny-papers were crumpled, at least they were there. Early that morning her father had read them to her and Davie, but one reading did not exhaust their charm.

Babs approached the table, walking lightly. Then came a big laugh from the card room, and Babs froze. On Sundays there were grown-ups everywhere, as strange and anonymous as wild animals you might meet in the jungle.

The dangerous sounds died down, and Babs picked up the funnies. While she was putting the pages together, she saw the water lilies nested in a flat bowl; stubborn and stinky, their stems coiled, and their heads were raised like the heads of snakes. Babs touched one. Open! commanded the empress, dribbling water over her pink linen dress, open, or I will cast you to the garbage cans!

No matter. Babs retreated to the armchair and began to read Little Nemo, following his dream adventures with Toto, the reassuring personage who appeared each Sunday, cigar in mouth, green nose flat in his flat face.

Some change in the atmosphere made Babs look up. Her Uncle Joe stood in the doorway, shot-glass of whisky in his hand. He looked at her as if from a great distance, and said nothing. He was a stocky man who drooped everywhere, eyelids, cheeks, moustache, belly; there were deep black rings under his eyes.

"Hello, Uncle Joe," said Babs, her voice almost failing her.

He seemed to be trying to smile, though no smile appeared. Granma came heavy-footed out of the dining room, her black dress of English embroidery swishing with starch.

"Joe, I have to talk to you," she said.

"Larry?" said Uncle Joe abruptly, and granma, even granma, looked scared. She nodded. "Ma, he's not to have a cent. He's got to learn. That's final."

Babs stood up and began to edge around Uncle Joe as if he

were a haunted house. But before she could get out, he had swallowed his whisky at a gulp and gone.

Granma readjusted her glasses with a hand that trembled a little. She came to Babs and patted her head with the kindly hand still shaking. "Darling, you all right?" she said. "Read, read. You're going to get a good dinner."

Babs was eased; she went back to Little Nemo's world, where everything was always a dream in the end, and somewhere beyond she heard granma go out to the porch and the chairs pushed back as everyone rose, and the voices greeting ma.

Green as Toto's nose were the enameled flies buzzing in and out of the stable, making a noise like small flying machines. Larry drew hard on his cigarette and shook his head, where the buzz of the flies seemed to be imprisoned.

Morton, having won out over the ice-cream freezer, relaxed against the wheel of the Mineola cart which stood shafts down at the side of the stable; he watched Mr. Larry, who sure looked like something was bothering him.

"That Carrots acting real quiet today," said Morton. "Maybe we break him in yet."

"Not Carrots," said Larry. He didn't want the chestnut trotter broken; he loved to drive him, with the balance between them always in question. He loved Carrots, and the fact that no one save Morton and himself dared approach the finely bred horse. Buying Carrots had been an awful extravagance; Joe had raised hell about it but had finally paid for him. Ma must have spoken to Joe, though she never admitted it. "He was a good buy," said Larry heavily, using words that were familiar enough, but always foreign to him.

"Carrots, he a good animal," said Morton. "You got something on your mind, Mr. Larry?"

"Plenty," said Larry. He threw away his cigarette and went inside through the warm smells of horse and leather which were mixed and polluted with those from the half of the stable that was used as a garage for Mrs. Sherman's car. In one corner, the winter body of the Packard was put up on wooden props;

the canvas top was raised over the car itself, and under it an oily drainboard shone with dingy rainbows and stank of the modern world.

In his box-stall, Carrots threw back his head and whinnied. Larry opened the door and stepped in, and Carrots moved softly, nuzzling the pocket of Larry's blazer. "Here you are, boy," said Larry. Carrots gave his palm a wet caress, picking up the lump of sugar. Then Larry pressed his forehead to Carrots' glistening neck, and Carrots did not stir.

Morton had moved easy, just enough to watch what went on, without startling the nervous creatures in the box-stall. He was lighting his corncob pipe when Larry came out.

"You recall in the old days, Mr. Larry, you wanted a beebee gun, say," said Morton, and Larry smiled. "Maybe you need some money, I be glad to—"

"I always need money," said Larry. "Right now I need it worse than usual. I tried to get Joe to give me an advance on my salary, and you should have heard him. Listen, Morton, Joe'd kill you if he found out."

"I ain't afraid of Mr. Joe," said Morton. He chuckled. "Mr. Joe do something to me, your ma she kill *him*. How much you need, Mr. Larry?"

"Too much. I can't take it from you, Morton," said Larry. "I need a hundred dollars."

A hundred dollars was sure a lot of money. Morton puffed on his pipe and spoke through smoke rings.

"I meet you at the depot tomorrow afternoon, I give it to you then," said Morton.

"I'll see that you get it back, Morton."

"That's all right, Larry," said Morton, and Larry put his arm about Morton's shoulders and hugged him, as he had long ago when Morton lent him the money for the beebee gun Larry had already bought. Then Larry went rapidly to the house, going in by the same side door used earlier by Babs, and for the same reason.

Claudie, her back turned to the sun on the porch, saw Larry in the hall. She followed her brother upstairs.

"Lawrence," said Claudie, low, to Larry, who had just unlocked the japanned box and thrown back the lid. "Come to my room a minute. I want to talk to you."

"Talk here," said Larry, gay, the headache gone. "What's all the secrecy?"

"It'll look more natural if you're in my room," said Claudie. "Oh, come on!"

Larry let the lid of the box fall back, and went with Claudie, who shut the door behind them.

Babs had been rooted out by Miss Wilson, governess to her and Judy, and ordered upstairs to wash her hands. The place to wash her hands, of course, was her parents' bathroom, where she could get a whiff of home life amid the stacks of books, the photos of herself and Davie in the bedroom, mother's nightgown and kimono, father's pyjamas and bathrobe hanging on the bathroom door. She knocked and opened the door.

Claudie jumped.

"Barbara, you've been taught to wait for an answer."

"I'm sorry, mother," said Babs, facing the two strangers who happened to be her mother and her Uncle Larry. They looked dangerous to Babs, and she made a getaway. Sundays were simply awful.

Still, she listened outside the door, and heard her mother say, "But, darling, from a servant!" and the *darling* was said in the exact tone reserved for Babs, and, well, Davie, when her mother was in her absolutely best humor.

Alone, bereft, she wandered down the hall toward another bathroom.

"Babs, come here," whispered Judy. She was standing in Uncle Larry's room by the open japanned box, holding a sheet of paper.

"What are you—" Babs began, full-voice.

"Sh!" said Judy.

"What are you *doing*?" whispered Babs. "Listen, if we get caught they'll murder us." She came to Judy.

"It's just some kind of a picture," said Judy sorrowfully. What had she hoped to find? She didn't know, and the whole

thing was still a mystery. She took heart. "Don't you wish you could keep it, though?"

"No," said Babs, not even caring how peculiar she sounded. She was set on Fame, a treasure to be laid up in heaven; maybe she would be a great dancer, greater than Pavlova, or maybe a great singer, or maybe both.

"Well, but look!" whispered Judy. "I bet you it must be very valuable, or why would he keep it locked up?"

Babs looked at the picture without touching it. It was a picture of a lady sitting in a dark cloud, combing her hair; beside her stood a black horse looking alarmed, and facing that horse was another, a dappled gray, with most likely a prince on his back. Behind the lady was a hill covered with green grass and enormous red flowers. The colors shone like jewels, the grass was greener than Toto's nose, and above there were columns of foreign writing that looked like music. "Oh!" said Babs, enchanted (maybe she would be a great painter instead).

"Look out! I hear someone," said Judy. Quickly, quickly, she dropped the picture into the box, shut the lid, and the little girls beat it out of there to the bathroom opposite. They ran water over their hands, shaken with giggles, and Larry came briskly into his room and turned the key in the box.

"Better get a move on, you kids," he said. "Dinner's ready."

"Hello, Uncle Larry," said Judy, but shyness shut down on Babs, and she could not speak, even when Judy kicked her. She managed to give Larry a solemn smile, feeling sorry for him; Uncle Larry was peculiar, too.

But when Judy asked Babs if she didn't think it was peculiar of Uncle Larry to lock up a little picture like that, Babs felt a great wave of relief.

"Yes," she said, and clattered downstairs, a member of the tribe for once, stoning the sport.

5

AFTER THE long Sunday dinner, the house was quiet while Mrs. Sherman lay down. Carl Nathan retired to his room hoping for a little let-up from the Shermans if he had any luck, but he had hardly settled down to the music page of the paper when someone knocked. And that's no surprise, thought Carl, going to open the door; the surprise would be if no one knocked. Belle Hoffman stood there holding the tray from which she had eaten dinner in her room. Carl had not seen, and scarcely heard her since the day when her husband's countercharge had been published. Now he was pleased that she looked so well, if a little uncertain in her manner.

"Come in," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Is Claudie here?" said Belle. She came into the room, wearing a lingerie dress that made a pretty sound as she walked.

"Claudie's down on the porch," said Carl. "Want me to take your tray?"

"Don't disturb yourself," said Belle. "I'll just go down to the pantry with this. I wanted to see Claudie a minute. Later will do."

But she did not go, and Carl asked her to sit down. She did not do that either, but stood irresolute in her finery, a lady, thought Carl, who had never done a day's work in her life and looked it. He winked at her.

"Everything under control with Larry," he said. "A little bird told me."

"Well, I just—" said Belle, surprised. She decided to confide in an outsider, which in this case Carl was. "All I know is, Joe came in and hollered at me not to give Larry any money."

"I happen to know Larry got it anyway," said Carl.

"How did you find out?"

"Stands to reason," said Carl, who, more out of dislike for Joe than sympathy for Larry, had asked Larry privately if he could help out, at which Larry had disclaimed any need for money.

"I don't want to know who gave it to him," said Belle. "Don't tell me. Joe will be wild."

"No reason for him to hear about it," said Carl.

"Yes—" Belle wandered to the mirror and stood before her image as if she did not see it. Belle was up against it now, thought Carl, dependent on Joe unless she could force her husband to come across with support.

"You're looking very festive, Belle," he said, and Belle smiled at herself in the glass.

"It's my new Bendel," she said. "It's been hanging there in my closet. I thought I'd put it on."

"Fine idea," said Carl. "Very becoming." He wondered a little why Belle should get so dressy to take a tray to the pantry, but found it a good sign.

"Thanks," said Belle, and went away cheerfully. Carl picked up the paper; he had not got past the first paragraph on Caruso's real or reputed throat operation before Claudie came in.

"Belle's all fixed up," she said. "I'll bet she knows Alec's here."

"Belle said the story wasn't true, and that's enough for me," said Carl. "Give her a break, can't you?" But Claudie had gone on to the bathroom without listening. Carl read that Caruso was well again, and thought he must remember to check their opera subscription for next winter. He smiled to himself at the rush and roar which followed the toilet being

flushed. You might have expected Claudie to be tossed out on a wave.

Claudie stood at the bureau and caught up the back of her hair with a wire hairpin.

"Well?" she said.

"Well, what?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

"What am I, a mind-reader?"

"Carl, have you spoken to Joe?"

"What about?" said Carl, and saw Claudie's lips tighten and her shoulder twitch.

"Do you mean to tell me you've forgotten what we said about the loan you need?" said Claudie.

Carl had forgotten, and remembered now unpleasantly.

"Oh, that. I told you I'd consider going to Joe. Anyway, now would hardly be the time. For one thing, he's got a load on, and for another he's got Larry on his mind."

"How did you know about Larry?"

"I'm not deaf," said Carl. "If Joe wants to keep a secret, he should talk about it before he's finished half his quota." Joe Sherman drank a quart of whisky a day, a matter the family did not care to have referred to.

Claudie sat down on her bed, looking worried.

"Carl, do you know who's giving Larry the money?"

"Certainly," said Carl. "Morton."

"How did you know?"

"What then?" said Carl. "Morton's the only one that's not afraid of Joe."

Claudie laughed in spite of herself, but her shoulder, as if with a life of its own, twitched once again. Carl marked the shoulder and considered the time of the month in relation to his wife, wondering if Claudie was going into one of her moods. But he forgot the warning when Claudie took off her glasses and rubbed the sides of her nose. Claudie looked helpless with her glasses off, her gray eyes a little vague as they glanced in the direction of her husband.

"I wonder what Larry needs the money for," she said, and Carl shrugged.

"Cards. Show girls. The track," he said. "Larry has very modest tastes; he's quite content with the best of everything."

"I don't find that funny," said Claudie. "You are going to ask Joe for the loan, aren't you?"

"That will do now," said Carl, but her glasses were still off, and Carl loved her. "I told you I'd consider it."

Claudie clipped back the pince-nez and picked up her embroidery.

"That centerpiece," said Carl, "has been in the same state for the last two summers. When are you going to give it to the old lady to finish?"

Claudie opened the door.

"Davie still sleeping?" asked Carl.

"Yes," said Claudie, "and don't you get him overexcited when Lena brings him down." She lowered her voice. "Carl, what did you think of Alec showing up as if nothing had happened?"

"He did the right thing," said Carl. Claudie said nothing, but her shoulder answered him, and Carl wondered again about her mood. She had been on an even keel for a long time now, and he told himself he was imagining things. "Belle probably doesn't even know he's here."

Belle, lingering in the pantry, did not know for sure. She was eating a ripe peach, leaning over the sink to save her dress, when Alec pushed open the swing-door.

"Alec!" said Belle, the peach slipping from her fingers. She washed her hands and dried them hard on a dish-towel, not looking at Alec.

"My dear Belle," said Alec, standing in front of her but away from her, reaching his arms out and clasping her elbows in his hands, "what an awful thing for you!"

Belle moved free of him.

"I don't want to discuss it," she said. "I'm just beginning to feel human."

Alec continued to look grave.

"At least you might have spoken to me when I phoned," he said. "If I hadn't been afraid of more talk in the papers, I would have beaten Seth up."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous, Alec," said Belle. "You've never hit anyone in your life."

"This would have been a good time to begin, my dear," said Alec. "You're looking very fit." He looked, himself, as well-favored as ever.

"Thanks," said Belle. She sat down at the pantry table, feeling thoroughly in command of the situation. Alec was nothing for her; he made only enough money to wear the best clothes, eat lunch at the Plaza every day, and get by with all his wealthy friends. Belle looked at Alec's expensive English shoes, and asked him how he found ma; Alec told her, over a glass of water, that ma seemed to be in the pink.

"She wants a game of pinochle after her nap," said Alec.

"See to it that she wins. You know how she can't bear to lose," said Belle, and the two of them laughed, and Belle thought how simple it was, really, once you made up your mind to things.

"Tough summer for you, Belle," said Alec. "At least you've got the girls for company."

"I'll tell you the truth, Alec. I don't like women," said Belle, superior to others of her kind who were less specialized.

Alec patted her arm and the blooming woman drew back sharply. If Alec noted this, he said nothing about it. Serious, friendly, he inquired for news of Belle's oldest brother, Simon.

"He's in Carlsbad, as usual," said Belle. "I don't know how he gets away with it with Joe."

"Why shouldn't he?" said Alec. "Si knows what he wants. Where's Flora now?"

"Flo should be in Paris," said Belle. "We heard from her this week by the *Kronprinzessin Cecilia.*"

"At that, she was pretty broken up when Harry died," said Alec.

Belle shook her head.

"You know Flo," she said ominously, but Alec just answered that Flora enjoyed life, nothing wrong with that, was there. "Sometimes she enjoys it entirely too much," said Belle, and who was she talking about, Flo or herself, for suddenly she pushed back her chair and stood up.

Alec rose politely to his feet, watching Belle.

"I must go," said Belle, not moving.

"Whom do you like, if you don't like women?" said Alec, as motionless as Belle, and Belle's made-up mind came undone. She walked into Alec's arms and put her mouth to his.

Mrs. Sherman banged open the swing-door.

"Ma!" said Belle.

Carl, following Mrs. Sherman into the pantry, exclaimed "Belle!" almost at the same time.

"Once wasn't enough!" said Mrs. Sherman. "You had to repeat it." Then she turned to Carl and lowered her voice to a whisper, "Carl, where is Joe? I don't want him finding out about this."

"I heard him phoning about trains," said Carl.

"All right, then. Alec, you're to leave Belle alone."

"I'm sorry, ma," said Alec calmly. "Your daughter's too attractive."

The old lady did not smile.

"She made one mistake, Alec. She's not out of that one yet. You hear me; stay away from her."

This time Alec did not answer, only kissed Mrs. Sherman's cheek and left the pantry. Belle seemed to be trying to cry, which, thought Carl, was the least she could do.

"Ma—"

"Get upstairs," said Mrs. Sherman.

Belle gave a long sob; her dress made a foolish, pretty sound as she went out.

"A fine way to behave!" said Mrs. Sherman, which was just what Carl was thinking. "How I'm going to get her divorced and remarried without a scandal?"

At that moment Carl wouldn't have given a plugged nickel for Mrs. Sherman's chances. But the old lady seemed less con-

cerned; she moved into the kitchen and called to Carl to come along. "Gisela left some coffee on the stove," said Mrs. Sherman. "I'll heat it up. You'll feel better after a cup coffee, Carl. How could you be so dumb, to believe Belle?"

"I'll never learn," said Carl, feeling better.

"Here, take a cookie," said Mrs. Sherman, offering a plate of the stars, half-moons, suns, which she had baked on Friday. "Just so Joe didn't catch her, it doesn't matter too much."

6

ON MONDAY morning, Susan Jacobson came home from her week-end visit. She got off the train holding up her ankle-length blue serge skirt in a ladylike sweep. Morton waited for her on the platform. Would Morton forget that she was not a child any more? No; Morton touched his hand to his cap, picked up her suitcase, and led the way to the car.

"You enjoy yourself, Miss Susan?" he asked, waiting to help Susan into the car.

"Wonderful!" said Susan, thinking of the college man who had credited her with two more than her fifteen years, and asked if he could call. She put her foot on the step, and then whirled about to sit with Morton. "We went to a dance Saturday. If mother knew!"

Morton started the motor and rolled out between surreys whose horses drowsed under their straw hats.

"You wouldn't tell on me, Morton?" said Susan.

"Me?" said Morton. "I bet you was the belle of the ball."

"I put my hair up," said Susan. "Really up." At home, all her mother would grant her, and that for special occasions, was a coiffure which Susan felt bitterly was much like a horse-tail, braided and doubled, a ridiculous stick down the back of her neck, tied with a wide bow.

"Bet you looked fine, Miss Susan," said Morton.

They drove into the village, past the grocery, the ice-cream parlor, the dry goods store. Outside the butcher's, a lady in a pongee duster waved from the open window of her electric. Susan could just hear her voice through the clang of a trolley going by, its long pole whizzing and throwing off sparks from the wire overhead.

"Hello, Susan," called the lady.

"Hello," Susan called back, and she asked Morton anxiously who was that again, would she tell her mother she'd seen her sitting up front with Morton.

"That Mrs. Stein," said Morton. "Friend of your Aunt Claudie, your Aunt Belle. She don't tell nothing. She a good sport."

Out of the village, they drove under maple trees; the houses, set far back on their lawns, were quiet under the high sun. As they approached the Sherman house, Susan saw a German nurse from down the street wheeling a baby carriage.

"Morton, there's what's-her-name. Look, she's waving," said Susan, waving back, but knowing the nurse's greeting was not for her. Susan had overheard some talk, but she would have known anyway about that greeting. At her age, fifteen and ripe for love, Susan's very skin was sensitive to each degree of affection. Morton did not answer or stir, and when Susan looked back what's-her-name had disappeared. The dappled street stretched empty behind them. "Morton, did you see anyone over the week-end?" asked Susan.

"Two of the Ryan boys ask me when you be back," said Morton.

Susan tossed her head, and her chestnut mane skidded over her blue serge shoulders.

"Those fresh!" said Susan.

The tires crunched over the gravel drive, a sound which carried, but even from her front seat Susan saw no sign of life at the Ryans'. They stopped under the porte-cochere, and Susan got out in a hurry before her mother could catch her, took her suitcase, and smiled at Morton.

"Mum's the word," said Morton.

"Thanks," said Susan, and went into the house to get the homecoming over with. She ran up to her mother's room, kissed her mother's cheek, and prepared to answer her mother's questions. She would have no trouble omitting the major items of her visit, the college man, put-up hair, swarms of partners at the dance; there had been nothing in Emma Jacobson's girlhood to make her think of such pleasures. Indeed, Mrs. Sherman had sometimes wondered—aloud—whether she was ever going to get Emma married off. Not that she meant it. Adelaide Sherman was not displeased to have three sons unmarried and the fourth single until he was thirty-five, but an old maid daughter was something she would not have stood for. It had been bad enough to have Belle, younger than Emma, marry before her. Even Minnie, no beauty, almost got ahead of Emma.

"Did you thank them nicely?" Emma's questions to her daughter began now, going on to the suitability of Susan's clothes, whether she had eaten whatever was served her, what had been served, the décor of the house, how many were kept in help, and what had been done from Friday afternoon to Sunday evening. Susan answered everything, not excluding Saturday night, when, said Susan, they had gone to someone's house.

By this time Mrs. Sherman had entered, followed by Minnie and Belle. Susan stood up, Mrs. Sherman sat down and made forceful comment.

"You're better off at home," she said. "Who are these people?"

"Mrs. was a Goldman from Cincinnati," said Emma, chasing down antecedents. But it didn't matter that Emma said these people had a very nice background; they weren't Shermans, and that was enough for the old lady. This exchange was interrupted by the arrival of Claudie in the doorway. She wore a dark blue flowered chiffon dress and a peach basket hat wreathed with flowers.

"You going to New York?" asked Mrs. Sherman.

"I told you this morning, ma," said Claudie.

"That makes another trip for Morton," said Mrs. Sherman. "You should have arranged to go with him when he met Susan."

"Oh, ma!" said Claudie. "Morton won't be overworked. Rose Stein is stopping by to take me to the depot."

"That's different," said Mrs. Sherman.

In the pause that followed, Minnie leaned forward with her meekest look.

"Susan, did you catch a beau?" asked Minnie.

"Such talk!" said Emma. She turned to Susan, and Susan suffered the scrutiny of her three aunts and her mother, all of whom, thanks to Minnie, were now regarding her as some object made of anything but sugar and spice and all things nice. But this was Susan, honey-colored, honey-sweet, not beautiful, with her broad calm face, something better than that, being all woman and glad of it. Her brown eyes did not really take in her relatives, all old and alike to Susan; this was only a prelude to life, and she was almost there.

Emma's head shook with an almost imperceptible tremor, looking at her lovely child; she took refuge, as always, in rectitude.

"You may go and unpack now, Susan," she said. "See that you hang your things up neatly. This afternoon you'll write to thank them."

Susan went to her room, opened her suitcase and turned it upside down on her bed, and ran to the window. She saw Christopher Ryan at the door of the Ryan barn, tore down the back stairs and emerged sedately to the back lawn. Davie Nathan, staggering around in his sand-box, tossed a spade over the edge and yelled, "Spade!"

"*Schon wieder!*" said Lena, his nurse, but when she gave him the spade he threw it away again and yelled for Susan.

"Hello, Davie darling," said Susan, only a little louder than necessary. "I'll give you the spade."

Chris Ryan called through a leafless place in the hedge between the lawns.

"Hi, Susan!"

"Oh, you there?" said Susan. "I thought you'd be at the beach."

"Come on over," said Chris, his face appearing behind dry twigs.

"Well, I shouldn't," said Susan. "I've got an awful lot to do."

"Ah, come on over."

"Just for a minute, then," said Susan, and beat her way through the hedge. Davie looked after her in silence, then opened his mouth and bawled. So Susan went through the hedge twice more, to give Davie his spade and shut him up, and back again to the Ryans' yard. Here she began to pull leaves and twigs from her hair, acting as if Chris was not there. Chris came to her, loose-jointed, and offered to help.

"I can do it," said Susan, moving away with Chris ahold of her mane. She looked up at the awninged windows of the Ryan house, identical with the Shermans'. "Who's home?"

"Mostly everybody went to the beach," said Chris, referring to his eight brothers. "Stand still, can't you?"

Susan stood still, and Chris, tall behind her, rummaged in her hair and got out a leaf. He gave it to her, to show his honorable intentions.

"My gosh, you sure are a mess," he said. "I got a comb in the barn, you could get straightened out."

"Christopher, I told you and Michael I'd never go in that barn again," said Susan. Christopher was one year older than Susan, and Michael was two years older; the seven other Ryan boys were younger.

"Well, my gosh!" said Chris. "Just to comb your hair, for goodness sakes."

"Do you promise?" said Susan. "Do you solemnly swear?"

"I swear!" said Christopher.

"All right, then," said Susan, "if you solemnly swear."

"Didn't I *tell* you?"

Susan stalked into the barn with Chris after her. He found a comb in the pocket of an old coat, and told her to sit down on the hay.

"Why?" said Susan.

"Oh for goodness sakes!" said Christopher.

Susan walked past two incurious horses champing in their stalls, to the dark, sweet-smelling haymow, and sat down on the slippery hay. Chris sat down beside her, Susan turned her head away from him, and Chris combed her hair. For thirty seconds this was all that happened, while tensions hummed like a trolley wire between them, and then one of the horses stamped. Did Susan move first, or Chris? Perhaps both of them moved at once, clinging to each other with pure, impersonal passion. But as soon as one or the other of them tumbled Susan backward in the hay, Susan pulled violently away and ran out of the barn, leaving Christopher empty-armed and trembling.

"I told you!" said Susan, from the spaces of open air and sunlight to Christopher in the shadowy barn. "You promised. I'll never—never—"

Christopher had long ago accepted the doctrine of original sin, his; he did so once more.

"Gosh, Susan," he said. "Oh, come on back."

"I will *not*," said Susan, and she walked to the front of the house, around the Ryan circle of hydrangeas, around the Sherman circle of hydrangeas, and ran smack into Mrs. Stein, waiting in her electric to take Aunt Claudie to the station.

"Why, Susan, what's the matter?" asked Mrs. Stein, the lady Morton had said was a good sport.

"Oh, those Ryan boys!" said Susan, half-forgetting which one it had been this time.

"Softly," said Mrs. Stein, glancing at the house. "Come here. Now," she said, when Susan came to the open window of the car. "Which Ryan was it?"

"It was Christopher," said Susan.

"What did he do?" asked Mrs. Stein, pulling a wisp of straw from the neck of Susan's blouse. She smiled, becoming, for Susan, detached from the blur of elderly grown-ups, taking on a mysterious, glowing, enviable life.

"He kissed me," said Susan, eyes shining, lips flushed. "I'll

never talk to him again as long as I live."

Rose Stein still smiled.

"Don't be so mean, Susan," she said. "Maybe Christopher liked it, even if you didn't."

Susan was so surprised she couldn't help laughing.

"Now get on upstairs before your mother catches you," said Mrs. Stein.

Susan did as she was told. When she got to her room she shut the door and went directly to the window. But the Ryan yard was empty.

7

In the loft occupied by Carl Nathan's firm, there was a difference between the showroom and the hinder regions as strait as the division of heaven and hell. The light was the same, pouring thick as syrup through the open windows, and fans everywhere churned the air. But in the showroom green plants and widely spaced partitions gave an illusion of coolness.

Behind sat the models in a narrow room, yawning and gossiping until the time came to put on winter suits and coats, to draw fur collars about their damp necks, and glide before the buyers.

Far back, in the stretches of the workrooms, the smell of sweat soaked the air, and the loft shook with the thud and clank of irons, clatter of shears, whir of sewing machines. The tailors, pressers, cutters talked in Yiddish, addressing their grievances to the Lord Jehovah, a question of hours of heat.

"The weather's one thing they can't blame on me," said Carl Nathan to his secretary, and Miss O'Donnell smiled over her notebook. This office, Carl sometimes thought, was purgatory, where he expiated without end the venial sins of being employer and support of a family. He sat small and neat at his roll-top desk, the top-level of which carried a picture of Claudie taken this spring at Bad Nauheim, and a studio photograph of Babs and Davie, lovingly posed and spandy-clean in

Peter Robinson dress and sailor suit. "If this heat keeps on we'll close a little early." He looked up at the snapshot of Claudie, remote as a star in her fine dress and great rolling hat. "When we move, I'm going to see to it the workrooms have cross-ventilation."

Miss O'Donnell, who had been with Carl for eleven years and knew him like the back of her hand, saw that his eyelids looked a little weary.

"I won't be surprised if the temperature hits ninety today, Mr. Nathan," she said, giving Carl an acceptable reason for his sudden tension.

"Must be almost that now," said Carl, and these two looked at each other, relieved, over their rigid collars, Carl's high and starched, Miss O'Donnell's sticky net boned into the base of her ears. Mary O'Donnell stood up, a wiry middle-aged woman, her hair dyed pitch-black sitting on her head like a bird.

"I'll type up these letters," she said. "Did you want me to make an appointment for you with the insurance doctor, Mr. Nathan?"

Carl, intending to take out more life insurance, had forgotten about the examination which must precede it; he thanked Miss O'Donnell for reminding him, and asked her to make a date for him next week or the week after.

"Slipped my mind entirely," he said. "No wonder. I'll bet I haven't seen a doctor for myself in a year." He sat back a minute after Miss O'Donnell went out; this was one of the frequent times, which had been such a source of surprise to Claudie, newly married, when the business went on about him and he had nothing to do but worry. Carl smiled, and went out of his office, stopping to look in at the bookkeeper who was working on a financial statement for Carl to show his bank; Claudie would just have to forget her nonsense about asking Joe Sherman for the loan. He passed through a deserted, inner region, lit with one unshaded bulb, where the finished garments hung on racks waiting to be shipped out or sold; he'd had a good season so far, but Carl walked a little faster here. Beyond, in a room full of daylight, Jerome Hayes, the best designer

Carl had ever had, was pinning cloth to a dummy.

"Working on the Jenny suit?" said Carl. "How goes it?"

Hayes turned; he was a massive young man, towering over Carl.

"I think I'm getting it, Mr. Nathan," he said.

Another dummy, wearing the original suit, stood nearby; Hayes had been at it two days now, figuring how to reduce the twenty-three pieces which made up Madame Jenny's model to ten or twelve without ruining its style. The black broadcloth suit was the essence of style; experts like these two men saw at a glance the handmade braid along the lapels and pockets, the craftsmanship, elegance, taste which had gone into its construction. Carl had fallen for it the minute he saw it at Jenny's showing in Paris, but he would never have bought it if he had not had Hayes in his employ.

"We'll take out some of the gores and use darts instead," said Jerome Hayes. "And I think I can get away with cutting the collar in two pieces only."

"If you think so that just about settles it," said Carl.

Hayes turned back the jacket, and touched the white satin lining in which fleurs-de-lis were woven. "We'll use a black or a taupe crepe de Chine lining, of course. This is too impractical. Beautiful, though."

"The whole thing is a work of art," said Carl. "You'll have to put more width in the skirt, Hayes."

"I'll ease it," said Hayes.

"Never manage to get a petticoat under that," said Carl. "I had quite a discussion with Madame Jenny about these hobble skirts. She claims the women will stop wearing petticoats, but I told her she was giving me a bum steer."

"It won't happen this season, anyway," said Hayes. "Next season, we'll see."

"The petticoat manufacturers'll get it in the neck, if Jenny's right," said Carl, worrying by proxy. "Well, I guess that's their lookout."

Miss O'Donnell came in.

"Mrs. Nathan's on the phone," she said.

Carl went back to his office and spoke to Claudie, who told him she was calling from Putnam's.

"I'm going to leave an order for the Britannica," said Claudie. "I thought I'd better speak to you first, Carl."

"Go ahead," said Carl; the Nathans had another encyclopedia, a wedding present, but it wasn't much good. The kids had a right to a thing like the Britannica, he agreed with Claudie about that. What didn't they have a right to, thought Carl, worrying, this time not by proxy, while Claudie told him about various papers and bindings; last year Babs had started at a private school, she went to a dancing class, took French lessons with Judy, and in a couple of years would begin to have her teeth straightened. At least, thought Carl, half-listening to Claudie, Babs' French lessons would not be the waste of time his own Hebrew lessons had been. When Claudie stopped talking he told her to use her own discretion in choosing the edition, and to remember the heat and take things easy. He said goodby, and went to meet his friend Henry Blum at the Café Martin.

The headwaiter greeted them, and led them to a center table. Carl opened his yard-square damask napkin and considered the large menu.

"What about chicken salad?" he asked the menu opposite, and the menu waved assent. Then it was lowered to permit Henry to talk over its top.

"A hot consommé would sit well to begin with," he said. "How about it, Carl?"

"Sounds good to me," said Carl. The waiter took their order and left them. "How goes it, Henry? Family well?"

"Everything under control," said Henry, using a characteristic expression. The little man stood five feet tall in his Oxfords; he had dark hair which seemed to be painted on his head, pink cheeks, and an imperious carriage. Henry looked, thought Carl, not unlike the father doll in Babs' dollhouse, with a stern dignity easily cracked. His business, inherited like Carl's, was wholesale ladies' dresses, the highest quality on the market. He and Carl had been friends since school days, always

in touch with each other, even when Henry was at Amherst, and Carl, his father dead, was carrying the weight of his mother and young sister on his nineteen-year-old shoulders. When Davie was born, at three o'clock in the morning, Carl had waked Henry to tell him the great news.

The two men looked about them, nodding to friends and competitors. The large, airy restaurant, paved with marble, spaced with green palms, was almost filled; three musicians took their places on a dais and struck up the Merry Widow Waltz. Carl, who played the piano, listened for an instant.

"Hear that pianist?" he said. "They ought to shoot him first and try him afterwards."

Henry smiled, but he had no ear for music.

"How're you making out with the Jenny suit?" he asked; Carl had bought it against his advice.

"*Gott sei dank*, I've got Hayes," said Carl.

"Plenty more like him," said Henry sharply.

Carl said nothing; Henry always seemed annoyed when Hayes was mentioned, and was always speaking of him. Now Henry picked up a fork and held it over his plate.

"I'm on the track of an interesting item, Carl," he said. He paused. "A set of gold spoons from Malmaison, engraved with the Imperial bees."

Imperial bullshit, thought Carl, a man devoted to the *mot juste*, but he listened with apparent interest. When Henry got through a description of the spoons, size, weight, place of manufacture, Carl asked how he had got on to them.

"I have a man in Paris who keeps me posted," said Henry. "He does all right for me. I happen to know there's another collector who wants them, but I'm topping his bid."

"You know what he's offering?" asked Carl, and Henry nodded, looking pleased with himself. Carl didn't consider this a strictly kosher way of doing business, but he said nothing; it was only spoons, so what the hell. Carl could see those spoons now, probably in an open coffer on the Blum library table, together with the busts, dress sword, medals, small arms, miniatures of Josephine, Marie Louise, and the King of Rome,

all beneath a wall hung with a tattered flag authenticated to have been picked up on the field of Austerlitz. The poor *Schlemiel,* thought Carl affectionately, watching Henry. But then he incautiously suggested that Henry needed a souvenir of Waterloo to round out his collection.

Henry turned scarlet to his paint-flat hair; he pressed his hand to his stomach.

"That salad was a mistake," he said.

"Try a mint," said Carl, taking Henry's sign of distress at face value. "Your man might find you a companion piece for the other flag. Must have been a lot of flags at Waterloo."

"Not interested," snapped Henry.

Carl was paying no attention; he half-rose to get a better look at a large, genial-faced man taking his place at a table near the door.

"I think that's— Yes, it is—"

Henry didn't turn round.

"Who're you talking about?" he asked.

"Name's Pisano," said Carl. "Claudie and I met him going over last year. I told you we met Caruso on the steamer. Pisano's a friend of Caruso." Carl spoke Caruso's name in the tone Henry had used for the gold spoons from Malmaison.

"I see where Caruso won't be doing any more singing," said Henry. "Trouble with his vocal cords again."

Carl quoted yesterday's *Times* to Henry, and Henry said you couldn't believe what you read.

"What are you talking about?" said Carl, rather shaken. "Be a terrible thing if Caruso lost his voice. There won't be another like that in a hundred years, if then. I'm going to take Babs to hear him next winter."

"Babs?" said Henry. "Babs isn't much more than a baby."

"Anyway," said Carl.

Henry raised his small hand for the check and took it firmly away from Carl.

"You blowing me?" said Carl. "What's the big occasion? Listen here, now—"

"This is on me," said Henry, paying.

"Thanks," said Carl. He followed Henry toward the door, and stopped to shake hands with Signor Pisano and ask for news of Caruso's health.

"You don't worry, Mr. Nathan," said Signor Pisano. "I return just now from Italy. He sing better than ever." Carl said that was the best word he'd had in weeks, promised to remember Signor Pisano to Claudie, and went along to Henry who was waiting for him at the checkroom. Henry looked impatient when Carl told him what he had heard.

"Carl, if you're happy, I'm happy," said Henry. "But after all, what is he? An Italian ditch-digger who can sing."

"That's something I'd expect to hear from my dear brother-in-law Joe Sherman," said Carl, "but not you." Even if Henry had no ear for music, he knew about all the evenings when Carl, a young man with heavy responsibilities, had worked until eight o'clock and then bought standing-room at the Metropolitan, eating supper only when the opera was over.

"You know I didn't mean it that way," said Henry, and Carl saw, surprised, that Henry was really upset. But on the street outside, Henry's disturbance vanished and the little man's face showed no more expression than the father in Babs' dollhouse. "Mind if I just stop in with you?" asked Henry. "I'm curious to see what Hayes did with the Jenny suit."

"Come right along. Delighted," said Carl, and was ashamed at the hint of suspicion that chilled him.

8

LATER IN the afternoon, Claudie made her way to the train through Penn Station. The coaches were half-empty, and she chose a seat on the shady side. When she sat down, her chiffon dress caught on the plush upholstery as if on a mass of burrs. She disposed her parcels at her side, and pulled off her long silk gloves. All day she had moved through the city with calm precision, but when the train jolted to a start she saw the other Claudie in the dark mirror of the window, her face all shadowy planes slipping and shifting. The engine whistled far ahead, a long sound flattened by the tunnel, and a puff of smoke drifted by behind the frightening image whose green eyes, set unevenly, stared back at her.

The train rolled into daylight; through the dusty glass Claudie saw the poor, spread out along the sills of their tenements. A coffee-colored baby waved, and Claudie, restored, waved back. She let herself remember the aggravating drive to the depot this morning with Rose Stein. Rose, always positive, had been positive today that Claudie fussed too much about her children. "They're nice kids," Rose had said, as if Claudie thought otherwise. "They'll grow up anyway. You might as well take it a little easy about them." How could Claudie tell her that Rose's own children behaved like wild Indians? Really, Rose could be impossible.

Claudie's shoulder gave a small twitch under the flowered chiffon. If you loved your children you did everything for them, you worried about them, and of course she loved them. When she had been pregnant with Barbara she had read all of Shakespeare's plays, taking Carl's guying with good grace: Carl had claimed that some of the plays were scarcely suitable for an unborn lamb. She had consulted Dr. Holt on how to bring up Barbara, and when Dr. Holt banged that door in her face, saying, "Bring her up the way your mother brought you up," she had gone elsewhere for advice. Only today she had bought Madame Montessori's book on children. That wasn't all she had bought today at Putnam's, was it? Claudie moved uneasily over her fast-held dress.

The train rattled hollowly over the trestle, and around a curve Claudie saw the engine, already in the future. It was for the future of her children that she had bought the Britannica, surely a necessity, though perhaps not in the luxury, limp leather, rice-paper edition that she had ordered. But that was an investment, she told herself and Carl, wondering if he would be angry, wishing she had some money of her own. She couldn't count on the checks Joe sent her and her sisters now and then, which Carl called handouts and the family called Joe's generosity.

Reeds stood slender, in clumps, out of the shallow water of the inlet, and men raked for clams, the whole scene suddenly oriental, a Japanese rice paddy in the *National Geographic;* all the reflections were long and thin like the legs of cranes. Claudie pushed up the window and salt air stuck to her. She looked at a page of the Montessori, not reading. By the time Davie was on the way no one believed that outside influences mattered, and the foetus which became Davie had not been fed mysteriously on Shakespeare—Claudie didn't really care much for poetry—but she always did the best she could for both the kids. Everybody makes mistakes, Claudie thought, answering Rose hours later; I couldn't help hugging Barbara sometimes when no one was around, and I can't see where it hurt her even if it isn't advised. Had it hurt her? Claudie came out of

her trance and began to read.

When she got off at the sun-struck depot, she saw Larry jumping down from another coach, and called to him. Larry came over, took her packages, and kissed her neck where he could get at it under her peach basket hat.

"You're early," said Claudie. "How'd you escape?"

"Paul Haydon dropped in to see Joe after the market closed," said Larry. "They were tanking up, and I made my getaway. It beats me what Haydon sees in Joe."

"That swell?" said Claudie. She hooked her hand through Larry's arm.

"He's been coming in two or three times a week since his wife died," said Larry.

"He must really like Joe," said Claudie, and the brother and sister began to laugh. Claudie mimicked their friends as she would not have done to anyone in the world but Larry. "Joe Sherman's a wonderful man, so devoted to his family."

Morton was waiting for them at the end of the platform. He helped them into the car.

"Hello, Morton," said Claudie. "I'm surprised ma let you come to get us."

Morton smiled. "Must have been a scorcher in town," he said.

"Sure was," said Larry. "Morton—"

Morton turned away as if he had not heard, and climbed into the front seat. He started the motor.

"Hey, Morton, did you get it?" asked Larry.

Looking straight before him, Morton nodded.

"Oh, you can talk, Morton," said Claudie. "I know about the money. Not that I approve."

"I got it, Mr. Larry," said Morton.

"Thanks," said Larry. "I'll tell you something in confidence, Morton: you're going to get paid back sooner than you expect."

"What's the money for?" asked Claudie. "Come on, Larry, tell me."

"You'll think I'm crazy," said Larry.

"I won't," said Claudie, prepared, because it was Larry, to understand anything. "And I won't tell a soul."

"I bought a Persian miniature," Larry burst out.

"A what?"

"A Persian miniature. It's not the first I've bought, either."

"Larry, does Joe know?"

"God forbid!" said Larry. "I told him I owed some bills. Claudie—"

"He'd be furious. Much worse than he was when you bought Carrots. I don't know why—"

"Just don't let him find out," said Larry. "Look, Claudie, horses he can at least understand, but pictures—"

"Larry, you know perfectly well I'm not going to tell," said Claudie. "Honestly, though, the least you could do is to show it to me."

"Fair enough," said Larry.

They drove on in companionable silence, Claudie's hand once again resting in the curve of her brother's arm; they were close to each other, the two youngest, who had been born when the family was prosperous, the two Shermans who had gone to college and been in and out of each other's books and confidences and rooms till Claudie had married. After a while Larry began to tell Claudie about his miniatures, concealed until now like a guilty love. Even with Claudie, Larry had to add quickly that sooner or later the pictures would be worth a lot of money. Claudie's hand fastened more firmly to his arm.

"Darling," she said, "you can skip that."

"Smart girl," said Larry, secure in his sister's love, which made her understand.

"Persian miniatures!" said Claudie. "How did Joe know you needed money?"

"I asked the bookkeeper to give me an advance on my salary. He's been told not to do that any more. And then Joe found out," said Larry. "Joe always finds out."

"Not this time, darling. I'm dying to see the picture," said Claudie, and Larry looked cheerful again.

The car turned in at the drive.

"Anybody home?" Larry asked Morton, handing Claudie out of the car.

"Your sisters at the beach," said Morton. "Your ma playing cards with her ladies. I got to call for her later."

Claudie waited for her brother.

"Go on in," said Larry. "I'll be right up."

"Oh, such nonsense!" said Claudie to Morton and her brother. "I won't open my mouth."

"I know," said Larry, but still they waited. Claudie let the screen door bang behind her and watched through it while Morton gave Larry the hundred dollars. She felt hot with anger and shame; she had no money at all, and, living like a fine lady, could not save her brother from this moment.

"Will you be able to pay Morton back?" she asked when Larry came in.

"Don't you worry about that," said Larry gaily.

"I could let you have a few dollars," said Claudie. It was only last year that Carl had given her an allowance for running the house; she still had to go over all the bills with him. "I've got a little left from the last check Joe sent."

"Forget it," said Larry. "Come on, I'll show you. First wash your hands."

"What do you think I am, one of the children?" said Claudie, but she went obediently to wash her hands, drying them carefully, running an orange stick under her pale, almond-shaped nails. When she came to Larry's room she found him standing motionless, looking into the open japanned box.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing, really," said Larry slowly. "Somebody's been at this box, though. See? I left the miniature in that envelope."

"Minnie," said Claudie.

"Not this time," said Larry. "It couldn't have been. I only left the box unlocked for those few minutes when I was in your room yesterday. Minnie was downstairs on the porch all the time."

"Then who—"

Larry's expression changed, shut Claudie out.

"Oh, never mind, Claudie. No harm done."

"Barbara was up here. She walked in on us."

"That doesn't prove a thing," said Larry. "Now don't punish Babs."

"You know she's never punished," said Claudie distantly. "I just reason with her."

Neither of them got much fun looking at the miniature after that, and as soon as Larry had put it away Claudie went to her room and looked out of the window at the back yard.

Babs and Judy were playing in the wooden swing. They had taken out the boards which separated the seats, and were rocking fast. Babs did not hear her mother call.

"I'm Hook," she shouted. "Jas. Hook. The only man that Morgan ever feared."

"Barbara," called Claudie a second time. "Come up here."

"Gee, she sounds mad," said Judy. "Don't give me away about Uncle Larry."

"Nonsense, of course not," said Babs. She ran upstairs and burst in on her mother. "Hello, mother."

Claudie shut the door, and Babs knew that Judy had guessed right: mother was mad. She stood stock-still in the center of the room, and her mother sat down in the rocking-chair by the window.

"Barbara, you know there's just a few things I lay great stress on," said Claudie. There was a pause, and Babs shrank inside her skin. "One of them is telling the truth. Now I want you to tell me if you were in Uncle Larry's room yesterday before dinner."

"I was in his room," Babs said cautiously.

"And what? Did you look at the miniature?"

Babs thought that over before answering.

"I looked at the little picture," said Babs.

"Was Judy with you?"

Babs nodded.

"Answer me, Barbara. What else did you do?"

"Nothing else. I just looked. I didn't even touch that ole picture," said Babs.

"One of you opened the box," said Claudia. "Did Judy?"

"No," said Babs, having given her word, and not seeing where this left her.

"No, what?"

"No, mother."

"Then you opened it, didn't you, Barbara?"

Babs would have gladly given away Judy then, but it was too late.

"I did not."

"You don't have to be fresh about it," said Claudia. Babs saw her shoulder twitch and became quieter than ever. The reasoning proceeded. "Tell me the truth, darling, that's the most important thing. I can't have you grow up a liar. Now tell me what happened."

"I just now told you," whispered Babs.

"I'm not going to punish you," said Claudia. "I know you didn't mean anything wrong. Just tell me the truth and nothing will happen to you."

"Mother, I'm not lying," squeaked Babs.

"Darling, it's because I love you that I'm insisting."

Babs was silent. Her mother stared out of the window for a long moment, and then turned violently to face Babs.

"All right. You're not leaving this room till you've told me the truth."

Babs stayed where she was, in the center of the room; she and her mother looked at each other, and nothing in Claudie's nine months of reading came to Babs' rescue, however her mother may have passed on in her bloodstream knowledge of the quality of mercy. Claudia began all over again.

"Mother!" sobbed Babs, too proud to cry; but she couldn't help herself. Then, hopeful, she peered at her mother through her tears.

"That doesn't affect me in the least," said Claudie, and round and round they went, and once Claudie sobbed too, reasoning with her daughter. "I told you I wouldn't punish you," said Claudia once more, and then once more. "But you must learn to tell the truth."

Babs wept. She stood there, with dangerous space on every side, while her mother got up and took off her hat and sat down and began again. The westering sun thrust through the window, and mother and child were knee-deep in gold, battling for principle.

"Come here, Barbara," said Claudie, and Babs advanced until her mother could put her arms about her. Babs stood stiff as a board in her mother's embrace, but then Claudie pulled Babs to her lap, and Babs, her body remembering this maternal warmth and safety, always longing for more, pushed her face against her mother's shoulder and wept. And gave in.

"I did," she said.

"You did what, darling?"

"I opened the box and I took out the little picture."

Claudia kissed her.

"That's all I wanted," she said. "Here, use my handkerchief. Now go over to the bureau and see what I brought you."

Babs slipped away and picked up a package. A long sob shook her. She pulled off ribbon and paper and disclosed a book.

"Thanks, mother," she said, holding the book to her chest.

"It's the Oz book you wanted," said Claudia. "All right, you can go now."

When her child had left the room Claudia said wearily, "Jesus Christ and General Jackson!", took off her dress, put on a wrapper, and fell asleep on her bed.

Carl woke her an hour later. She opened her eyes, looking half-drowned under the tides of sleep.

"Oh, it's you," she said, when Carl bent over to kiss her.

"You expecting anyone else?" said Carl. He went into the bathroom and began to draw water in the tub. Claudie was lying back again with her eyes closed when he came out. "I have a message for you, Claudie. I'll give you three guesses."

"Oh, Carl, I'm in no mood for one of your jokes."

"All right, I'll tell you. Remember Caruso's friend from the boat? Pisano?"

"Of course I remember."

"He sent regards."

"He did?" Claudie sat up. "Where'd you see him?"

"At the Café Martin. I had lunch with Napoleon," said Carl.

Claudie laughed, and Babs, waiting outside to throw herself on her father, felt the ice age shut in again, and crept upstairs to her room. She did not hear her mother saying she'd had to teach Barbara a lesson.

9

A FEW DAYS later, mail came in from Europe. Simon, the oldest brother, sent a comic postcard from Carlsbad of fat-behinded women in bathing suits; on the other side, in the delicate, cursive script with which he put down columns of figures at Sherman and Company, he had written a brief note to Dear Ma and Girls. Emma Jacobson looked with equal disfavor on both sides of the card, read it to her mother at the breakfast table, and passed it to Minnie.

"Tear it up when you've seen it," she said. "I don't know what the maids must think."

"You'll keep it for Larry tonight," said Mrs. Sherman. "What the maids think is their business."

Emma's head shook, but she said nothing. She opened a thin envelope from the Hotel Continental in Paris and drew out a single sheet of paper. " 'Dear Ma,' " Emma read out loud. " 'Hope you are well and enjoying the summer. Had a quiet trip over, took most of my meals in my cabin. The Loewenbergs were on board, sent their regards. Mrs. L. is as big a bore as ever. Very few people in Paris now, but then all I want is a good rest. Love to everybody, Flora. P.S. Am enclosing a snapshot which I hope I don't look like.' "

Emma picked up the envelope again and took out the snapshot of Flora, her widowed sister, still in mourning even if she

herself did not look mourning. Flora's veil, fine net with a narrow crape edge, put Mrs. Sherman in mind of the cemetery. It was about time for a visit. The old lady sat at the breakfast table dunking coffee-cake into her cup while Flora's picture passed from one daughter to the other. She announced her decision.

"Who's coming with me?" she asked.

Only Babs and Judy met her eye; this was a trip they were never required to take. Claudie rolled and rolled a bit of dough into pellets, Minnie gazed meekly at her plate, Emma's head shook an involuntary no. Belle, who had been coming to meals lately, read over an ad as if she had not heard. Susan Jacobson spoke up; she'd been roped-in to the last visit.

"I've got a date to go to the beach, granma," she said

In the silence, Mrs. Sherman took a final sip of coffee.

"Emma, you'll drive out with me," she said. "I'll tell Morton to bring the machine around in half an hour." She got up and went to the screen set before the pantry door. "Your own father," she said. "No respect."

Silence again, until the door swung back. Minnie, who had been expecting the axe to fall on her, gave a little laugh.

"Emma, you're stuck," she said.

"That isn't the way I look at it at all," said Emma. "Ma's right. It only shows the proper respect."

Claudie never stopped rolling the pellets of dough; now she stood up and spoke as if from far away.

"Barbara," she said, "don't you ever think you have to visit the cemetery when I'm dead. Don't go into mourning, either. Barbara, did you hear me?"

Babs nodded, frightened, and watched her mother drift out of the room. Judy reached under the table and pressed Babs' cold hand.

"Run along now, you kids," said Minnie. "Miss Wilson?"

Miss Wilson stood up, a very proper little governess, and smoothed her skirts; below her unfashionable small waist her hips spread out regardless.

"Judy," said Minnie, "don't go too far away. I want to have a little talk with you later."

"Yes, mother," said Judy sweetly, giving Babs a beleaguered look.

"Come, girls," said Miss Wilson, and walked out with her charges, one on each arm, leaning against her rock-ribbed sides.

"Why you keep Wilson I'll never understand," said Emma, bound to get back at someone for her shanghaiing. "What good is a Canadian accent?"

"Judy's crazy about her," said Minnie.

"That's just it," said Emma. She really believed that a governess with an English accent whom Babs and Judy disliked would have been for the best, but she would not have put it that way even to herself; it was merely that she knew what was right. "Well," she said, "I'd better change. This light blue wouldn't be appropriate."

Mrs. Sherman, on the back porch, called to Morton, but he did not answer or appear.

"Now where's he gone?" she said to herself, in a bad humor.

The waitress darted out, wet cup in one hand, dish-towel in the other.

"I get him for you, Mis' Sherman," she said; she was a pretty blonde girl, nineteen, just two years off her farm in Bohemia.

"You go on back to the pantry and finish your work," said the old lady. She walked heavily down the steps and over the sparkling grass, holding her linen skirt out of the dew. Beanie danced up to her, barked once, and attended her on her way. She moved under an arch of bird-songs, in a shimmering, humming ring of dragonflies, crickets and bumblebees; butterflies launched themselves into the air on their patterned sails; a caterpillar humped over the grass and Mrs. Sherman, unseeing, set her foot in its laced shoe down on it, finished it. That Morton! Where was he?

She walked past the croquet court, past the swing and Davie's sand-box, past the children's garden full of weeds and spindly

plants, to the barn. Carrots stamped in his stall. Where was Morton?

Then, counterpointing the summer sounds, came a thin wail. Mrs. Sherman, her lips set, moved to the side of the barn and found a baby carriage braked on the grass. She peered through the mosquito netting draped over the carriage and saw an anonymous baby mewling.

"Morton!" shouted Mrs. Sherman, and the baby howled.

While Morton's feet clattered down the stairs from his room above the barn, Mrs. Sherman leaned over the baby carriage. A fly had gotten under the netting and sat cleaning his legs on the baby's forehead.

"*Pfui, Teufel!*" said the old lady, and picked up the baby. The baby stopped crying at once; he was safe home, and knew it. Mrs. Sherman glared at Morton over the baby she was jouncing. "Tell that girl to come down here and attend to her job. I ought to get her fired."

"I'm sorry, Mis' Sherman," said Morton. He couldn't tell her that Frieda, the German nurse from down the street, had tiptoed upstairs without an invitation, not if he was to be whipped for it he couldn't tell her that. But Mrs. Sherman knew.

"Can't those girls leave you alone?" she said. "Morton, you be around with the machine in twenty minutes."

She put the baby back in the carriage and strode away without a backward glance. Frieda came out of the barn, and the darn girl wasn't even fussed. She put her hand on Morton's bare black arm, and laughed up at him.

"Don't you never do that again," said Morton. "Creepin' up on me like that!"

Frieda scarcely understood him; she had never seen a Negro before she came to America, and she found Morton handsome, sensible, and exciting. She giggled.

"*Auf wiedersehen*, Morton," she said, and she trundled the baby carriage out the back way.

"Jesus!" said Morton, all mixed up. But he had work to do,

and he got on with it. When he handed Mrs. Sherman into the car, twenty minutes later on the dot, his face was correctly without expression; the old lady winked at him. Emma, in proper gray voile, took her place beside her mother.

"We're going to the cemetery, Morton," said the old lady. "Stop first at the florist's. It's a nice day for the drive."

Emma's head trembled; you'd think ma was going to a picnic, and after the way she'd spoken to them at breakfast.

"Emma," said Mrs. Sherman, while they drove to the village, "what did Larry need money for?"

"I haven't the remotest idea, ma," said Emma. She met her mother's suspicious glance easily.

"You sure you don't know?" said the old lady. "I won't have things going on behind my back."

"Ma, I don't know."

"Well, I'm going to find out," said Mrs. Sherman.

Morton was smiling. Mrs. Sherman and Emma waited in the car while he got the flowers. Then, with the sheaf of coral gladioli shaking like swords on the front seat beside him, Morton drove off toward the cemetery. It was a long drive, and the ladies did the cook up thoroughly en route, with time for a word about Flora. Flora's face in the snapshot, Emma felt, for all its frame of crape-edged veil, showed signs of an improperly timed recovery from the death of her husband.

"*Na*, what did you expect?" said Mrs. Sherman. "She hated him."

"Just the same," said Emma, "it's not right."

"That'll do," said Mrs. Sherman, and the drive to the cemetery gates was finished in silence.

In silence the iron gates were swung open for the car, and slowing to a reverent speed Morton drove through the green fields spaced with the tombstones and small houses of the dead. He stopped before a gray mausoleum built like a Greek temple, its sloping roof upheld by four pillars. On the triangle of stone fitted under the roof, letters were carved in relief: *Sherman.*

While the old lady stepped down from the car, a caretaker

ran up and unlocked the bronze door. Mrs. Sherman took the flowers from Morton and went inside, followed by Emma. There were ten crypts within, all open save one. That one was sealed with a marble plaque, and bore the legend: Daniel Sherman, Frankfort, Germany, 1838–1901, Beloved Husband of Adelaide Bruchner Sherman.

Adelaide Bruchner Sherman set the flowers at the base of the plaque and stood before it in silence, her old face grave but cheerful while she remembered the days of her life with Daniel and paid them tribute. He had been a good and just man; sometimes she had had to deal with justice in favor of human interests, once she had almost lost the battle—a bad time that had been—but together they had made out all right. *Beloved* told a lot of the story, but not all. Here, with Emma safely behind her, Mrs. Sherman looked at the carved stone and smiled. When she had given the order for it, the stonecutter had asked about adding the names of their children. "Where you'll find room for nine?" she had asked, and that had settled it.

Mrs. Sherman turned and walked out past Emma. She went around the small plot, making sure that it was properly cared for, and climbed back into the car. She tapped her foot, waiting for Emma, and leaned out to peer into the mausoleum. The sun overhead cast sharp light within the empty crypts. Nine left, room for herself and eight more. Well, the others would have to shift for themselves.

Emma joined her, and Morton drove slowly till they were out of the cemetery.

"We could drive on to Aaron's and see Janet and the baby," said Emma, refreshed, expansive, after this day's work.

Her mother looked at her outraged. "I was there three weeks ago," she said. "Morton, you go on home."

"Yes, ma'am," said Morton, smiling broadly. One thing Mis' Sherman didn't care much about was visiting Mr. Aaron Sherman and family in their swell house on the North Shore.

"He *is* your son, ma," said Emma.

"I think sometimes I'll have to remind him," said Mrs. Sherman. She paid ceremonial calls on the Aaron Shermans not

oftener than every six weeks in the summer, and that was enough, plenty, though Janet was a quiet girl.

Behind Morton the ladies were silent for a mile, and then Mrs. Sherman asked her daughter if Larry had had one of his headaches lately, were they keeping it from her, and what had he needed money for.

Judy and Babs thought they had lost the little puzzle with the ball bearings under glass; Babs was looking for it on the ground floor, and Judy ran upstairs to see if they had left it in their room. From the hall on the second floor she saw into Aunt Emma's room; her mother was standing at Aunt Emma's desk looking down into the open drawer.

Minnie jumped when she heard a footstep, and then smiled to see it was Judy.

"I'm just out of stamps," she said. "I thought Aunt Emma might have some."

Judy didn't care that her mother had been snooping, she forgot it at once.

"Yes, mother," she said, with pure love which cast out doubt.

"Come in my room a minute, Judy," said her mother. "Now, darling, you know you shouldn't have any secrets from me."

"Yes, mother," said Judy, after which she lied like a trooper, swearing she didn't know what was in Uncle Larry's box. To be on the safe side she thrust her left hand into the pleats of her Anderson gingham dress and crossed her fingers.

Minnie went to a Sherry candy box on her bureau and took out a small silver pin in the shape of a cherub.

"Oh!" said Judy, but Minnie held on to the pin. "Mother, can I have it? Can I have it for keeps?"

"First tell me," said Minnie. Judy told. "A little picture! I never!" She let go of the pin when Judy grabbed.

Judy ran to the mirror, trying the cherub on her pocket, on her collar, finally fastening it over her heart.

"Can I go now, mother?"

"Yes, darling. See if anyone's near the phone," said her mother. "Just signal to me from the stairs." But she put out her

hands and straightened Judy's rigidly straight hair ribbon, and Judy glowed under her mother's touch. "Now go on," said Minnie.

When Judy signaled, her hand over the darling cherub pin she had wanted so long, Minnie stole downstairs and called her brother Joe.

10

By EARLY afternoon, heat had settled over the countryside like a nesting bird, and the family went down to the sea. First the little girls took off with Miss Wilson and Susan, by trolley, since Mrs. Sherman would not permit Morton to be sent out again after the morning's trip. It was an afternoon when time flooded slowly, like the ocean they fled to, when the blazing sun covered all the sky, another full tide, and seemed caught, like the creatures beneath it, in sticky atmosphere.

Susan changed into her bathing suit, pinned her hair up under her cap, and went in for a quick swim. Then she sat in the shade of the umbrella and, as if not knowing what she did, pulled off her cap and shook her head. She was watching Christopher and Michael Ryan showing off beyond the ropes.

"Hi, Susan," said Judy, running up, followed by Babs, and, more slowly, by Miss Wilson.

"Hello," said Susan. She shook her head again, and, that not working, loosened the pins and the long, red hair began to tumble down. "Hang it, my hair's coming down!" said Susan, and she spread the bright mane about her shoulders, queenly and seductive. She just glanced at the lifeguard sitting atop the catamaran, at the Ryans plowing the green waters, and moved so that the mole above her right elbow would be hidden. There were moments, even for Susan, when adolescence took her, and she felt that the small brown mole would ruin her life.

"Miss Wilson, keep my pin for me, please," said Judy, fastening the silver cherub to Miss Wilson's bosom. Then she and Babs whirled about and ran, ran to the sea.

"Gently, gently," said Miss Wilson. She let herself down under the umbrella and sat fully dressed, legs straight out before her, back rigid. The bones in her corset were killing her, but you couldn't have told, and she kept her eyes on her charges.

Babs dipped one foot in the water and jumped back. Judy ran right in to her knees.

"Not yet!" cried Babs. "Listen, Judy, they'll make us get out —you know." But Judy could stay in forever and ever; Babs decoyed Judy.

"Look what I found," she said, darting over the hard wet sand, and that got Judy. "You can keep it," said Babs, pointing to a suspiciously live-looking shell she wouldn't have touched for the world.

Judy wanted to keep everything. She picked up the shell, turned it over, and tossed it away.

"That's nothing," she said, and they pranced off in search of treasure. They found a horseshoe crab, and Judy tapped boldly on the armor wherein the creature slumbered or hid, and the little girls drew away and watched its primordial lumbering movement as it dragged itself away to the water. There were pebbles, smooth, vari-colored, some of them with gold, perhaps, in their veins, and these Judy liked best; some were merely pink as a wild rose, blue as the changing hydrangeas, white, yellow, amber, primrose. There were curled and fluted shells, and workaday shells, gray and unpolished, with ridges to show the work of growing. Babs turned one over, letting it lie flat and open in her hand, and it was lined with nacre, the color of fairy tales.

Judy wanted that one, and Babs gave it to her. While Judy ran back to leave the valuable shell with Miss Wilson, Babs waded into the balanced sea, today warm and welcoming. The sea could be, as now, motherly kind, benign, receiving, or motherly cruel, sudden, changeable, rejecting, unreasonable. No telling about the sea, not for more than a day or a few hours, nor about mothers either. Babs swam out, even, the sea was so

kind, and rolled over to float on her back, looking up into the sky. Scattered small clouds, flocks of sheep in the blue meadow overhead, moved slowly, herded by the hand of the Lord. Two larger clouds made Babs think of the balloons that blew out of the mouths of people in the funny-papers. Could anyone read those clouds, what did they say? Ah, yes—"Honor thy father and thy mother and don't stay in too long." Babs rolled over again and swam to Judy.

"It's too calm," said Judy proudly.

"Yes," lied Babs.

They stayed in and stayed in and stayed in, and between them and Miss Wilson ran a frieze of children, throwing balls, flinging themselves flat in a whirl of sand, growing up. They were always in motion, and yet might have been a representation of action, so timeless each move, so known, so eternal. Now at the head of the beach came Belle, Minnie, Claudie, shadows long behind them, in black stockings, dark bathing suits, mobcaps down over their hair, faces pale and stern.

"Barbara," said Claudie, when Babs could no longer pretend she didn't see her, "how long have you been in? Your lips are blue. Show me your fingernails." Babs held out a hand shriveled with water. "Your nails are blue, too. Go out and let Miss Wilson dry you off."

Babs had to go then, leaving Judy, un-blue, in the sea. Davie, under the umbrella, made a grab at her, but Babs sat down away from him as if she did not know him. All around them she saw women smile at Davie, pink and plump as a cabbage rose under his blond hair. That Davie!

The women waded in with wide steps, plunged into the water and swam away, breast-stroke, like mother seals. Claudie cut loose with a crawl, going hell-for-leather away from domesticity and the care and feeding of children. Refreshed, she bobbed up on the outer rope, sat it like a mermaid, slipped into the water again and swam back. But near the beach, seaweed rotted and slimy caught about an ankle, and she walked out with sorrow trailing her.

Susan combed her hair, while the Ryan boys bounced a medicine ball before her; the lifeguard sat aslant his catamaran

to get a glimpse of her. Chris Ryan tossed the medicine ball to Susan's feet.

"I'll race you to the rope, Susan," he said.

"Oh, pooh," said Susan. "You'd beat me."

Babs was surprised.

"You could beat him, Susan," she said, when the Ryans went back to tossing the medicine ball.

Susan just said calmly that boys hated girls to beat them, and went on combing her hair.

Mothers and aunts returned from the water, sat down, dried their arms, took off their caps and fluffed out dampened hair. Claudie pulled the sweet weight of Davie to her, and spoke to Miss Wilson over his head.

"Barbara was in much too long. You know how overtired she gets."

"Oh, mother!" said Babs, dark outside the circle of her mother holding her damn baby brother.

"That will do, Barbara," said Claudie, and her shoulder ticked. "I'm the one that has the worry when you get sick."

A fluted whistle sounded over the beach, and Babs and Davie pointed like bird dogs. Babs scrambled up and ran wildly in the direction of the sound. Carl and Theo had arrived, bringing with them that friend of the family, the special friend of Aunt Belle, Alec Levy. Babs forgot her manners, sprang at her father and clung to him.

"Here, here," said Carl. "Give the old man a chance." He bent to kiss her and picked her off him. "All right, Babs, what do you say? Make a *Knicks*."

"How do you do," said Babs hastily, hanging from her father's arm, curtseying to Mr. Levy.

Arrived at the encampment, Theo kissed his Minnie, Carl kissed his Claudie, Alec lifted Belle's hand to his lips. Carl swung Davie high above him, Davie shrieked joyfully, and Carl set him astride his shoulders. He ran, stepping high, down to the sea, and Davie went on shrieking, happily, safely, from his perch, the Lord God holding him. In and out they went, with a dunk in the warm water for Davie and back to his mother's

lap. Then Carl went back to swim strongly, far out, beating the water with the strength of all the aggravations of the day, the order canceled, the order not placed, the terrible heat of the city. His feet beat a white wake behind him; the high still water which had so pleased Babs was not what Carl would have chosen; he would have preferred toppling waves to fight, not this warmth and compliance. This was too much like the atmosphere which had wrapped his good friend Henry Blum, making a second call on Carl, so soon after the first, and stopping in to say hello to Carl's designer. Carl doubled under the ropes and came up far beyond, shaking his black hair from his face.

Claudie gave a little cry that had too much energy behind it.

"Oh! Look where Carl is! Theo, tell him to come back."

"Take it easy," said Theo. "Carl's a strong swimmer."

"He's too far *out!*" said Claudie.

A quick look passed between Belle and Minnie, and Minnie told Theo to get Carl. When Carl came in, Claudia spoke to him sharply.

"What's the excitement?" said Carl. "Babs, I've got something for you. Here." He held a shell to Babs' ear, in which the sea sounded forever, and his daughter went a million light years away and returned before Carl had time to notice and be startled. He sat down and leaned his wet back against Babs.

"Carl, don't get Barbara all wet again," said Claudie. "Swimming way out like that! As if I haven't got enough to contend with." And she did, though she could not explain or understand with the prison-house of her own temperament beginning to shut her into the shadows.

Carl moved from Babs and lay down with his head on a towel; he pressed a hand to his stomach.

"Don't you feel well, Carl?" asked Minnie, not missing a trick.

"I'm a little under the weather," said Carl, closing his eyes.

Belle managed to shut out the voices. She moved from the shade of the umbrella; the sun was setting, and she did not risk sunburn on her creamy arms and face. She watched Alec come

toward her, sleek with water, his light brown hair darkened and dripping. Ma's right, thought Belle, he's nothing for me. But ma had been right about Seth, too, and Belle had married him anyway.

"Well, the gang's all here," said Alec, sitting down beside Belle.

"Yes," said Belle, "and you can kindly talk to some of the others, if it's all the same to you."

Alec smiled, and took his time answering. Belle knew that he didn't want to marry her any more than she wanted to marry him; someday he would marry a wealthy woman, that was the solution for Alec. Then Alec whispered to her:

"It isn't all the same to me." He took a pinch of sand and let it drop grain by grain on Belle's arm. "Belle, why don't you meet me in town for tea some day?"

"I wouldn't think of it!" said Belle, pulling her arm back from the caress of the sand. "I wouldn't even have come to the beach if I'd known you'd be here, the way people talk."

"Belle," said Alec.

"Maybe. Sometime," said Belle, her lips trembling.

"Dear," said Alec. "Phone me the next time you're in town. I can't call you."

Susan watched them all, her hair gold where the setting sun struck it. Gold gleamed the down on the women's arms, gold the wedding ring on Claudia's hand, fiery gold as she slipped it on and off her finger. The family party was silent, so silent that Babs caught up the sounding shell and held it to her ear like a shield. Davie gave a great bubbling yawn, and everyone laughed and prepared to go home.

11

By HALF-PAST nine, night sounds and colors meshed the house; at the farthest rim of the lawn, the dark texture of the trees broke under the street lamp to a patter of light on leaves. The great blooms of the hydrangeas glowed faint in the dark, the loosely woven cloth of the katydids scratched, firefly needles slipped in and out of the tapestried night.

Alec had left for town, Belle had gone up to her room, and the family sat on the porch creaking their rockers, trying for a breath of air. Claudia, all dark within, heard the rattle of the katydids—did—didn't—as part of her own rhythm, terrifying, inescapable.

Carl was aware of her near him; she seemed to have changed even since this afternoon at the beach. Her pale, oval face, with the full lips and greenish eyes, could be shining and free, madly gay and independent, and, conversely, sunken, the eyes deeper-set and always looking within, the mouth cruel or pouting like a baby's; the whole motion of her body, at such times, was slowed down and half-backward; she was sad at the expense of everyone. Claudie was not yet in the Slough of Despond, but she was on the downward path. Had there been any warning of Claudie's moods before they were married? Carl had thought no more of them than that she had mettle, and was a bright, exciting girl.

"Would a lemonade say anything to anyone?" said Carl, out of his anxiety. "Claudie, how about you?"

The others said no, thank you, and Claudie shook her head. The others went on talking; she tried to speak, to establish with words her own identity, and could not bring her heavy lips to open. The others sat about her like stones, she scarcely saw them, did not hear them, while her spirit streeled away into the shadows.

"Mor-ton!" came a cry from the back of the house, and whose voice was it? Hard to say; none of the maids sounded like that in the daytime.

"Those girls!" said Emma, rocking sternly.

Laughter rose and fell at the back of the house, and silence followed.

"What do you expect of them?" said Mrs. Sherman. "They're human too."

Babs and Judy, in bed, heard the laughter.

"Frieda was in the barn with Morton this morning," said Judy.

"Who is Frieda?" asked Miss Wilson, undressing in the dark.

"She's the nurse from down the street," said Babs. "She's in love with Morton."

"That will do, girls," said Miss Wilson. "I won't have you talking like that. Besides, that's nonsense. Morton is colored."

"She is too in love with him," said Judy. "Anyway."

"Like for instance Aunt Belle is in love with that Alexander Levy," said Babs. "And for instance Uncle Larry—well, who do you think he's in love with, Judy?"

"That will *do!*" said Miss Wilson. She took off her starched white underthings, petticoats, camisole, drawers, unbuckled her corset in a series of cracks like a gun popping, and restrained a sigh of relief. In decent nightgown and wrapper she stood before the bureau and took down her rip-roaring pompadour, laying its shorings carefully aside for the morrow. "All right, now. I'll hear your prayers."

Judy turned on her back, put her hands together over her

chest, and went through the Lord's Prayer and Now I Lay Me, with a coda of God Blesses, one of them silent, for the silver cherub in a matchbox bed beside her pillow. Babs repeated the performance; she didn't believe in God save in moments of weakness, but prayers before sleep were a rock to rest on. "They can't hurt you," her father had said to her once, which made it all right with Babs. It would be nice, she thought vaguely now, still in her position of knight's lady's effigy on a tomb, if there were a God for instance to head off mother sometimes. *Now.* Babs moved suddenly, and sat up straight.

"Babs, lie down. To sleep, both of you," said Miss Wilson like a general. She got into her bed across the room from the little girls.

"Listen, dearest," said Judy tentatively. She often called Miss Wilson dearest, and meant it.

"What, Judy?" asked Miss Wilson, soft from her mattress.

"I heard mother reading granma something from the paper about an earthquake," said Judy. "Could we ever have an earthquake here?"

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Wilson, and she and Judy mounted their nightmares and rode away. "What's even worse is the tidal wave that follows an earthquake."

"What's a tidal wave?" asked Judy.

"One enormous wave," said Miss Wilson, "that sweeps right over the land for miles."

"Could it be such a big wave that it could sweep right over Long Island?" said Judy.

"Certainly," said Miss Wilson. "Easily."

"Gee whizz," said Babs, scientific, "it would have to be simply tremendous."

Miss Wilson detected a note of scepticism and embroidered the theme, but Babs, liking the whole idea, beat Miss Wilson at her game, toppling Ryan house over Sherman, dragging the big trees from their roots, drowning Ryans and Shermans—it wasn't her fault if there was a tidal wave, was it?—and Carrots and the Holy Cook . . .

"Beanie could swim," she said finally, finding a way to save

him. "We could probably pull him onto our raft."

"Raft? What nonsense!" said Miss Wilson. "There'd be no time for rafts, let me tell you."

Babs thought that over and told Miss Wilson the billiard table on their floor would do. Judy made a strangled sound.

"I'm scared!" cried Judy, clutching the matchbox that held the silver cherub. Miss Wilson came to comfort her, telling her that there'd never be a tidal wave, not in our time, anyway.

Judy was afraid of dying, occasionally taken with panic at the thought that her heart might stop some night when she was asleep, and she would wake up dead, telling Babs that you couldn't *breathe* in a coffin; you wouldn't be breathing if you were dead, Babs told her now, but that scarcely helped. Miss Wilson did help, and after a while all three slept.

A while later all the household slept, and in the quiet dark, bodies at rest, let slip their loves and fears. Carl Nathan had his dream again, and could not lose it: the racks of coats, stretching to infinity, which he could never sell. He sighed in his sleep and woke Claudie from the drugs which held the shadows at bay. Not quite awake, not quite asleep, she turned on the bedside lamp. That did not rouse Carl, and she tapped her fingers sharply on the table.

"What?" said Carl, waking from one nightmare to another as familiar.

"I can't sleep," said Claudie. She might take another bromide —how many had she had today? "I didn't mean to wake you."

"That's a big help," said Carl, and Claudie glared at him. She went into the bathroom, shut the door, and turned on the water. Carl got up and went to the desk; Claudie's engagement book lay on the blotter. Carl opened it and turned the pages, finding a large, naïve check-mark eight days off. Before they married, and for a while afterwards, Claudie had said she wanted six children; now she had settled for two, and checked off each month lest there be some mishap.

Carl got back in bed and thought rationally that with luck there would be eight furious days to look forward to, but there

was an end to everything so why get yourself upset. He heard from the bathroom—Claudie had opened the door—the fizz of triple bromide in water, the rattle of spoon in glass. Still telling himself to take it all sensibly, his blood vessels contracted with the effort to show no sign of fear or anger; a vein swelled in his left temple.

Claudie stood in the doorway drinking the potion.

"What about Joe?" she said abruptly. "You didn't tell me. What about him?" Carl thought of Lady Macbeth, dazzled and fearful, drained of the milk of human kindness.

"Nothing," he said, and tension gripped him so that he almost gasped the word.

"Even that you won't do for me," said Claudie, weeping wildly. "I ask you to do one simple little thing and that's too much."

Carl got out of bed and went to her; he put his arm about her rigid shoulders but she pushed him away.

"Darling," he said, without hope.

"I wish I were dead," sobbed Claudie. The empty glass slipped from her fingers and shattered on the floor; the noise of the glass breaking was loud in the night.

It seemed to Carl that immediately afterward Minnie tapped on their door and entered. She tiptoed in, her face humble and yellow above the red and white carnations printed on her black Japanese kimono. She bent and began to pick up the splinters of glass.

Carl saw the family scene as if outside himself, the weeping young woman who was his wife, and Carl, her helpless husband, in rumpled pyjamas, black hair fallen over his face. He moved to get his bathrobe, put it on, tried to find some privacy somehow for both of them. He shut the door so quietly that it did not latch and wailed open when he turned from it. Minnie was telling him to get out a minute, and then, turning to her sister, telling her that she'd feel better tomorrow, tomorrow was another day.

Carl stood like a foreign body in the room, and Claudie huddled on a chair and cried. Minnie, in her kimono, homely

but ascendent, looked to Carl and said whatever it was Claudie wanted couldn't he do it for her, it never hurt to be a little agreeable.

What monster did Claudie see, name of Carl Nathan, thought Carl; she had raised her head and was watching him through her tears.

"He'll do nothing for me," sobbed Claudie. "He only thinks about himself."

"Oh, Claudie—" said Carl, very low, and Claudie's voice rose.

"I can't stand it any more!" she cried out. "A divorce is the only solution for me."

"All right, Claudie, all right. I'll do what you want," said Carl, and Minnie, chipper as a cricket, moved toward the door, saying, "There, Claudie. You see? I'm sure it couldn't have been such a problem."

Claudie wiped her eyes and got to the half-open door ahead of Minnie. She flung it wide and said savagely:

"That's right. Money's no problem for you. You're all dependents, you and Theo and Judy."

Minnie shivered under the blow, and crept out. Now Claudie let Carl lead her to bed and even kiss her good night; she sank to sleep. Carl went out to the hall and listened at the foot of the stairs. He heard nothing, and went back to watch Claudie in her stupor. Maybe she hadn't wakened the kids.

But of course she had. Judy had stood stalwart beside Babs at the banister, and held her back when she wanted to run downstairs. Then, at Claudie's cruel words to Judy's mother, the children had shifted positions insensibly, the tears running down Judy's face, and Babs comforting her. Miss Wilson came for them and without a word led them through the hall; as they passed the open door to Davie's room they heard him grind his teeth in his sleep.

12

THE TICKER tapped from the corner of Joe Sherman's office, and Joe got up to peer into the crystal ball which covered the mystery. He pulled a yard of tape from the high basket and read up it for the latest quotations; the market had closed ten minutes ago. Joe was absorbed in his reading, but, even with his back to the open door, he knew who went by in the hall behind him.

"Larry," said Joe.

"Yes, Joe?"

Joe kept Larry standing there while he studied another foot of tape.

"Nothing," said Joe finally; all he had wanted was to flick his brother, reminding Larry that he was there.

Larry went away, and Joe got a glass and a bottle of Scotch from the cellaret near the ticker. He was pouring himself a drink when the bookkeeper looked in.

"Mr. Joe," he said, "you busy?"

"Come in, Taylor."

Mr. Taylor stood at Joe's desk; he was in his shirt-sleeves, green shade over his eyes, paper cuffs wrapped around his forearms. He had been with the old gentleman, Mr. Daniel Sherman, and had gone with him from wholesale cotton goods to the airy values of Wall Street; he knew to a penny what the

firm was worth, and what the two partners, Aaron and Joseph Sherman, were worth, and wild horses couldn't have dragged the knowledge from him.

"Did you want me to answer this, Mr. Joe?" asked Taylor, holding out a cable. Joe looked up, and Taylor managed not to step back as if from harm's way.

"Si had a five-hundred dollar letter-of-credit and his passage paid both ways," said Joe. "It's always the same story with him."

Mr. Taylor waited.

"What's he asking for this time?"

"Four hundred," said Mr. Taylor.

"Send him two," said Joe, knowing angrily that this was exactly what his oldest brother expected. Simon was not a partner in the firm, and had no interest in being a partner. "Si has no ambition," the Shermans said darkly, as if this made him a bastard in their ranks. Si was content to be a bookkeeper; most of the year he perched on a high stool beside Taylor, adding columns of figures set down in his flowing script, but every summer he went off to Carlsbad and took the cure, like no bookkeeper ever. He, too, knew what Joe was worth, and, unlike Taylor, he did not hesitate to remind Joe, being without respect for this ultimate secret of all men above the laboring class. Si knew a power of secrets, Mr. Taylor sometimes thought; he had been around longer than any of them except the old lady.

"Two hundred dollars, yes, sir," said Taylor. "I'll get that right off."

"No hurry," said Joe.

"No, sir," said Taylor. Mr. Simon didn't have a penny put aside, but he always seemed able to get Joe to fork out; he certainly knew how to enjoy life, too. Taylor missed him this summer especially, when young Larry, learning the business, was supposed to be taking Simon's place. Larry was something of a strain, because he got so bored and angry with what he was doing that he made mistakes and Taylor was constantly checking up on him. Si, now, never made mistakes, did his job with perfect good humor, and had no ambitions. "Larry's got this

great opportunity," he said once to Taylor. "He's going to be head of Sherman's if he lives that long." Then Simon had shaken with silent laughter; he looked, round and jolly, like Foxy Grandpa. Mr. Simon wasn't a serious man like his brothers.

Aaron Sherman came into the office and lifted his hand slightly to acknowledge Taylor's presence. Simon had once told Taylor that Aaron was such a snob he'd even got himself to look like J. P. Morgan. "He's useful to impress the customers," Si had said, "but it's the other bastard that has the brains." Mr. Taylor coughed, remembering, and went away to wire the money.

"Well?" said Joe. He glanced at Aaron from the heavy-ringed eyes that looked as if he worried sleeping or waking.

"I'll be getting along," said Aaron. At half-past three in winter he got along to his town house, and in summer to his estate on the north shore of Long Island. "You're staying." This was a statement. Joe was the last to leave the office, and the first to arrive; he was rumored to come in on holidays and sit alone reading the papers.

"Carl Nathan phoned," said Joe. "I'm expecting him any minute."

"What does he want?"

Joe shrugged.

"He didn't say," said Joe. "What do they all want?"

Aaron nodded. On this plane, and in this office, the brothers understood each other, but Aaron wanted his money for the life of a gentleman, and Joe had other reasons.

Joe hunched his chair closer to the desk, and poured a drink.

"Carl's late, at that," he growled.

But the meticulous Carl was then on his way up in the elevator, three minutes late for his appointment. He was late because just as he was leaving Jerome Hayes, his designer, had come in to ask, with a certain fell cocksureness, for a substantial raise. Hayes had said that, frankly, he'd like to know soon; he didn't want to leave Carl, but he might have to make other plans. Carl had thought at once that Henry Blum was

involved in this bind, but he rejected the idea, and felt guilt at such suspicions of his closest friend. Still, the whole thing is all I needed, Carl could not help thinking now, after the night in Bedlam. But he was still his own man, deviled by the facts of his life and figuring ways out as nimbly as a mouse in a maze.

He stepped from the grilled cage of the elevator into the hall, and met Aaron at the door of Sherman and Sons. It was at this point that Carl's stock might be said to have started down. He had to look up at his brother-in-law, into the face fashionably bland, which yet seemed, under the fine Panama hat, to smell something vaguely unpleasant.

"Hello, there," said Aaron through his J. P. Morgan moustache, and kindly shook hands with Carl.

Carl's private opinion that Aaron was a very stupid man did not protect him from the withering condescension of his brother-in-law, who could buy and sell him five times over. So Carl, smaller than before, asked nervously after the health of Aaron's wife and child, and turned the knob of the frosted-glass door.

Joe kept him waiting. Finally he called from his office, and did not rise when Carl entered. He waved Carl to a chair.

"Warm day," said Joe, disposing of the amenities. "Well?"

The *well* was more of a wall than an opening, but Carl made do, and began to tell Joe the reason for his visit, except, of course, that he did not mention Claudie. It occurred to him, while he was talking, that it might have seemed odd to the outside world that he should come here for the loan instead of to a bank, but no Sherman would think so. Joe, especially, expected his brothers-in-law to come to him for everything; he gave them orders, he despised them and let them know it. Carl was not a man disposed to humble himself; the vein at his left temple began to throb while he talked. He took no more than a few minutes, but it seemed long, with Joe sitting slumped in his chair, drooping a little everywhere, eyelids, cheeks, moustache, belly. Once he turned his basilisk eyes on Carl and reached for the bottle of Scotch. Carl said no, thanks, and Joe drank alone. Concluding, and steadier now, Carl made his eminently fair

request for a loan at fair interest, which, he pointed out, would be secured by his shares of Standard Oil; he laid a typed set of figures before Joe, figures of which he was reasonably proud, since they showed the excellent condition of his business.

Joe shoved the statement away without looking at it.

"So that's all you want?" he said, with sarcasm.

This was what you got, thought Carl, for letting women interfere. The afternoon sun shone through the window and gold lay in a wide sheet over the desk, like a manifest of Joe Sherman's wealth. Back into Carl's head came all the arguments about Babs' and Davie's future, and the money Joe would leave them; maybe Claudie was right.

"I have to move," said Carl for the second time, showing no anger. "The business has outgrown the loft I'm in."

"When you married Claudie you told me you could take care of her. Now you come running to me," said Joe, enjoying himself. "Suppose you have a bad season."

The nightmare, all the coats he could not sell, invaded Carl's daytime mind; still he controlled himself, looking about the office to the crystal ticker smouldering in a corner. Long ago the Shermans had made him alive to the subtle difference in social position between one who never touched his wares, and one who did. Joe was once removed from trade; when an off-season came along, he was left with fading, invisible values, and Carl with equally useless coats. But now Joe was implying that nothing could happen to him, who practiced divination and sortilege. Still, Carl would not respond, save by indirection.

"My Standard Oil shares are worth four times the loan, at the present market," he said.

"A cloak-and-suiter is going to tell me about the market!" growled Joe.

Carl's face whitened. The insult had the effect of stripping him of all that made him a person, his various loves by which he lived. Joe sat before him like some heathen idol, a figure isolated and set almost madly on power. Only money, millions, could have made Joe address him as an equal, and Carl did not have that. Carl spoke with precision.

"I'm making this move for my children," he said. "They are also Claudie's children. I don't want her money—"

"She has no money," said Joe, but Carl did not stop.

"—and I didn't give a damn for your money when I married her," he went on. "However, the fact is that she has money in Sherman and Sons. She has never gotten so much as an acknowledgment of it. The handouts you make when you feel like it don't mean a thing."

"That's enough!" said Joe, and now he was angry.

"Claudie's share in Sherman's would undoubtedly guarantee that loan," said Carl.

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"Your father left each of the girls ten thousand dollars," said Carl. "At the time he died, the firm couldn't afford to pay. They all agreed to leave the bequests till some future time. That's the last anyone ever heard of it. Anyway, Mr. Daniel Sherman's will is on file at the Surrogate's office, and there isn't any question about what Claudie has coming to her."

Joe leaned over toward Carl.

"If you start anything," he said, "your children will pay for it."

"I told you I don't want my wife's money," said Carl. He picked up his hat with a trembling hand. "You'll make that loan to me, on my security, or not at all."

The trembling hand satisfied Joe.

"I'll think it over," he said.

LARRY GOT a glimpse of Carl going by, and saw that he had taken it on the chin. He wanted to say a word to Carl, hesitated lest Joe catch him at it, and got to the elevators too late: through the iron grille he saw Carl sink from sight.

As Larry turned to go, another elevator rose, and Paul Haydon stepped out. The two men shook hands and walked together to the Sherman door. Their looks were not dissimilar, and Larry's quiet voice, his accents, his unexceptional manners, were so like the older man's he might have been a young cousin. Haydon was sometimes amused and sometimes surprised when he saw Larry, since, to him, the Shermans might have been the product of spontaneous combustion.

"Is Joe busy, do you know?" he asked.

Joe, thought Larry, a headache beginning to beat at his left temple, has just chewed up Carl Nathan; he answered easily.

"Not that I know of. He's always glad to see you."

Haydon's office was on the floor below, and he was such a familiar at Sherman's that he did not wait to be announced. Since his wife had died, more than a year ago, he had been stopping by often in the afternoons for a drink with Joe; theirs was a friendship without intimacy, bounded by the places where they did business.

"Am I disturbing you?" asked Haydon. He stood in the doorway of Joe's office, with Larry behind him.

Larry watched Joe put down the newspaper and even rise to greet Haydon.

"Come on in," said Joe. He went to the cellaret for another glass, passing Larry as if he were not there.

"I'll get back to work," said Larry, and Haydon caught the sudden tension in his voice.

Joe did not turn until Larry had gone. Then he brought Haydon the drink and sat down. He raised his glass to his lips. "*Prosit*," he said, and Haydon repeated, "*Prosit*." They discussed the market for a few minutes, and Joe got up and shut the door.

"Larry took a flyer on the Curb a few days ago," he said. "Some fly-by-night copper outfit. He got two hundred shares on margin." For a second he seemed not to remember the name of the company, and then he supplied it to Haydon.

"He'll lose his shirt," said Haydon, concerned. "Wouldn't he listen to you?"

"I wasn't consulted," said Joe, as if Larry had broken the eleventh commandment.

"Well, you can still pull him out without too much damage done," said Haydon.

"I could have stopped it altogether," said Joe. "They called me up about his credit, that's how I found out. I told them O.K. Larry's got to learn his lesson."

Joe Sherman sometimes spoke like a prophet out of the Old Testament, thought Haydon, entertained in spite of feeling sorry for Larry.

"Wasn't it a mistake to O.K. the purchase?" he asked. "After all, you've committed yourself."

"That's right," said Joe. "I'll pay up for him, and he'll have to pay me back out of his salary." He lifted his shoulders in the ghost of a laugh. "Larry thinks because he's got a rich brother he can indulge his millionaire tastes."

He fell silent, brooding, and Haydon kept as still as if Joe were a wild animal. After a pause Joe went on, telling about Larry's damn fool impractical obsession with some kind of pictures.

"Pictures?" asked Haydon, without stirring.

"*Persian* pictures!" said Joe, announcing the ultimate in idiocy. He added that Larry had gone into debt for his most recent buy, and then had borrowed the money from Joe's mother's chauffeur.

"Are you sure?" asked Haydon.

"I have ways of finding out," said Joe, not mentioning Minnie. "Larry's got it coming to him. I won't stand for speculation."

Haydon smiled. Aaron and Joe Sherman had been gambling their heads off in Wall Street before their father bought out a brokerage house and took them with him. The brothers had been brilliantly successful in their ventures, but their father, Daniel Sherman, conservative and solid for himself and his customers, had disapproved; it was commonly believed in the Street that there had been some trouble between Joe and his father. Daniel died shortly after buying Sherman's; whatever the disagreement was it had been patched up by then, and the family business continued to prosper. Now Joe was censuring young Larry for a small, misguided wager.

Joe understood Haydon's smile, and smiled too.

"If I speculate, that's a different story," he said. "I know what I'm doing."

"No question about that," said Haydon, trying to remember what he had heard about a big loss Joe had sustained—was it before or after the old man Sherman died? Haydon had not known the Shermans then. Joe must have lost sometimes like the rest of us, he thought; nobody wins all the time. Haydon sipped his drink and watched the strange man, thinking how little he knew about Joe except his taste in cigars and whisky. In the sort of club which was the Market, men who never met outside business hours often knew more about their associates, about their mistresses, week ends off, extravagances, meannesses, than many members of their families, perhaps especially their wives. But Haydon did not even know where Joe lived, only that when Joe spoke of home he meant his mother's home.

Haydon might not have dropped in to see Larry after he said

goodby to Joe, but he happened to glance into the bookkeeper's office and saw Larry alone, half-lying back in his chair, long thin body stretched out but not relaxed, face pale and tense. Larry sprang up when Haydon came in, showing no surprise at this unusual visit, not even when Haydon advised him point-blank to sell the copper stocks while he could.

"I had it on very good authority—" said Larry. He had got the tip from Alec Levy, who ought to know since all his friends were big guns.

"Get out tomorrow, Larry. It's too late now to put in a selling order."

"It's very good of you, Mr. Haydon," said Larry. "But Joe O.K.'d my credit for the purchase. I didn't ask him first, but the brokers sort of took it for granted that Joe Sherman was behind me. I didn't stop them. Joe hasn't mentioned it to me, but it's up a quarter point since I bought. Anyway, listen, Mr. Haydon, Joe likes money too much to let me throw it down the drain." Larry was talking fast. "Joe certainly knows the Market—"

"That's just it, Larry," said Haydon. "You fool him, and get out."

"Jesus God!" said Larry. "He couldn't have just let me walk right into that."

He looked tired and ashamed.

"Joe's a fine man," said Haydon. "I'm sure he meant this for the best. Tell you what, let's just keep this talk under our hats." He offered Larry a cigarette, and lit one himself. He tried to change the subject, but his choice was not a happy one. "I hear you're interested in Persian miniatures."

"He knows that too!" said Larry. "The family'll think I've lost my mind."

Haydon let that pass.

"I know a bit about miniatures," he said, and it was true; he knew a bit about all the arts, though he had never caught fire from any of them. "Chap at the Chicago Art Institute is a friend of mine. I believe he's an expert on Persian art."

Larry sat up straight.

"You don't mean Mr. Arlott? You do? It's a small world!" Larry looked eased, as if the small world were pleasant, too. "I've been writing to Mr. Arlott. One of the dealers here told him I'm pretty good at restoring miniatures. I taught myself."

"You did? Must be exacting work," said Haydon.

"At that, it's a good change," said Larry, looking around the office. "You know, the Institute sent me some pictures to restore, Mr. Haydon. I haven't told the family."

"Why should anyone tell them?" said Haydon.

"There's no money in it," said Larry. "Just I like doing it."

"Sometime maybe you'd let me see your collection," said Haydon.

Larry flushed.

"It's not a collection," he said. "I've made a lot of mistakes. But there's a few good items."

"One of these days, then, Larry." Haydon put out his cigarette and said goodby.

Larry was whistling when, a few minutes later, he too left Sherman's.

Joe heard him, and thought, he'll whistle on the other side of his face soon enough. What had Haydon been doing in there, talking to Larry? He picked up his newspaper and shook the pages.

Much later, when everyone else had gone, he read through the financial statement Carl Nathan had set before him. He put the pages away in a drawer and locked the desk. Then he went to shut the windows of his counting house and stood looking out where the colors of sunset, rose, yellow, purple, lay like frescoes over the buildings. He seemed, standing there, as massive as the buildings.

Nothing out of the ordinary happened to him en route from Wall Street; he took the subway, got out at his station, stopped to buy a quarter's worth of dusty carnations from a street-vendor, walked on to an old-fashioned six-story apartment house. Yet the whole way he seemed to be growing smaller. He grunted a sort of good evening to the colored elevator boy, and the boy took his time following Joe into the cage of the elevator.

He shut the creaking gate, pulled at the cable which worked the elevator, and cast a bold glance at Joe.

"Warm day," said the boy, as if to himself.

"What? Oh, yes, yes," said Joe. He had his watch-chain out and was selecting his door key. "Well—"

At the fifth floor the elevator boy held to the cable, and he let Joe out, watching him go down the gloomy hallway. Eerie, that's what you could call Mist' Sherman, he thought, and he whistled to raise his spirits.

Joe unlocked his door and stepped inside. A pretty woman with graying hair put aside some sewing and stood up.

"Joe?" she said, quite as if someone else were likely to come in through that door.

"That's right," said Joe.

The woman came to him and touched her lips to his cheek. She took the tattered carnations from his hand.

"Thank you, dear," she said.

"Oh, those," said Joe.

"You go and wash up," she said. "I'll get dinner on the table." She moved away from him and went about her duties, indistinguishable from any housewife, except that she did not bear Joe's name, knew no member of his family, or much about his circumstances.

She folded her sewing, a chintz curtain she was hemming of material bought at a sale, to save Joe Sherman money. She brought the dishes to the table, sat down, and awaited Joe's pleasure.

14

THE MARBLE lobby of the Plaza eddied in the pale light, and the leaves of the palm trees were like new green dollar bills, folded and fanned out. Into the cool and moneyed ease drifted the lunchers, out of the common sunlight of the street. Belle Hoffman watched them, sitting in an armchair as big as a throne. She seemed not to notice the lively glances of the men who passed her; from under her huge hat heaped with roses she looked toward the entrance and was still. She was dressed in dove-gray from top to toe, and might have been almost in half-mourning; a merry widow, her thoughts were rowdy, and her body and mind were full of tunes she strove not to recognize.

A gray-haired man bowed to her, and Belle dipped her laden head to him; he was one of Flora's musician friends, a violinist or cellist, Belle couldn't remember. Flora just wanted to get away from the family, thought Belle, going with Bohemians, musicians, and some of Flora's friends were Christian swells, too, and that sort of mixing never worked, Belle could have told her; they always despised you underneath. Anything to get away from the family, that was Flora; no matter what she pretended she had no real family feeling. Flora's friend, the cellist or violinist, looked as if he wanted to come over to speak to Belle, and he was rather a handsome man, but then Belle's face flushed as she remembered the article about herself and Alec

in the *Times;* she stared right through the musician and he turned away.

Belle had come to New York today for two reasons—to have a fitting on a new corset, and not to see Alec. The first of these aims she had accomplished, and—Belle watched the entrance —the second seemed likely to be an equal success. All she had done, when she reached Penn Station, was to stand at the telephone operator's board and give Alec's phone number. But when the girl pointed out the booth where her call was waiting, she had changed her mind, paid and fled. Belle knew what was right.

Righteously, now, Belle kept her mind on all the hurrah at home, Claudie's gloomy state, Larry's headache, Minnie's snooping. Minnie—but Belle had locked her closets and her desk, and stuck her appointment card with the corsetière into the frame of her mirror. Let her snoop, thought Belle, feeling guilty over what she knew was nothing.

Contained by her intricate clothing, the bony corset rigid from below the bosom to beyond her hips, the silken shirt, the drawers, petticoat, the chiffon gown fastened with a myriad of tiny hooks-and-eyes and buttons, Belle did not stir, but the hot blood coursed through her. In spite of herself, suddenly, the most inappropriate numbers presented themselves, and she knew that it was exactly ten months, two weeks, and three nights that she had slept alone. For she had gone on sleeping with her husband until just before she left him, though she was bored and angered by him all day, and not excited by him at night either; knowing he ran after women, still she slept with him, no more considering those nights after dinner than the orange juice she drank at breakfast. Refreshed, restored, she had battled Seth till at last she left him, winning sympathy even from those who did not approve of divorce, because of Seth's infidelities.

Belle smoothed her gray silk jersey gloves, startled to motion by unwelcome memory. Dr. Berlinger, she thought; she always thought of him that way, and the formal title suited a version of the story which, often enough, she herself believed. It added

to one's luster to have turned down a man who offered to run away from wife and children because of you, but the true version she did not know what to do with, and forgot, except when she tripped over it in dreams. Did she have to remember now? For what had really happened at Bad Nauheim two years ago had begun suddenly in the doctor's office on his bouncy horsehair couch, after which he had conceived his mad passion for her, and not even after the first time, either. What fun it had been! Belle thought unexpectedly, and then, thank goodness, she saw Rose Stein coming toward her.

Belle called her thoughts to order, and went to meet Rose. They waited at the entrance to the dining room for the head-waiter, and a small chill shuddered through Belle, a woman unprotected by a man. But they were ushered to an advantageous table where Belle managed to get the chair facing the lobby.

"This is really a nice place in summer," said Rose. "I'm glad you ruled out Maillard's."

Maillard's had been Rose's suggestion for lunch, but Belle had managed. Now Belle wondered aloud if the Plaza food hadn't gone off lately, and Rose, eating eggs in jelly *à l'estragon* could not agree. She smiled at Belle and admired her hat.

"It's the first time I've worn it," said Belle, immediately worried lest she had given herself away. She told herself that she was bored, but lingered over coffee till Rose said that she must run along. They went through the lobby peopled with anonymous men and women, and out into the burning street.

"I have so many errands," said Rose. "I'll never get back in time for a swim."

"I guess I will," said Belle heavily.

"Ladies," said a pleasant voice, and there was Alec on the steps behind them. "I saw you lunching but I didn't want to disturb you. You seemed to have a lot to talk over. May I escort you wherever you're bound for?"

Belle thought of nothing to say but no, and this she could not bring out.

"Thank you," said Rose. "I'm going for a fitting just down the street."

"Belle, how about you?" said Alec. "May I drop you off somewhere?"

"No, thanks," said Belle. "I'm making the three o'clock train."

"Fine," said Alec. "Penn Station's on my way."

Before she knew it, thank heaven, Belle was handed into a cab, and Alec was beside her.

"You shouldn't have done that," said Belle. "I don't know what Rose will think."

"What's there to think?" said Alec.

"She might talk."

"Nothing to talk about. I wouldn't go near you in the restaurant for that very reason." Alec leaned forward in the shadowy cab and told the driver to take a turn in the park.

"I'll miss my train," said Belle.

"You can take a later one," said Alec.

Belle, at once immovable object and irresistible force, trembled a little. Alec sat back in his corner, and Belle knew, helplessly and with pleasure, how clever he was. The cab rolled slowly in the shade of the lush trees, past the Mall, where poor children climbed in and out of the wooden circles of the benches, their shouts sticking in the thick air. On rolled the cab, alongside the bridle path where a policeman cantered his mount, free to enjoy himself since all the riders were out of town. Belle felt safer, and bestirred herself enough, just enough, to smooth a silk glove up her arm.

"Aren't they warm?" asked Alec, taking her hand and opening, one by one, the three pearl buttons at her wrist. Finger by finger he pulled off the glove till her hand lay naked in his. "Why did you hang up this morning, darling? After you called me?"

"Oh, Alec!"

"No matter. You came to the Plaza, where you knew I always lunch. You did know that, didn't you, Belle?"

Belle shook her head, but all the roses heaped on her huge hat nodded in waltz time. The sun lay heavy on the roof of the cab, and sometimes a burning brand roared through the

shadows within, though to the man and woman it had become four o'clock in the morning, with only these two alive and sentient.

He won't respect you, said a small voice. You won't respect yourself, said a still voice. Shut up, said Belle to her voices, and they were silent right round the Rambles. At the Casino the voices began again, faintly, over the tumbling joy: Respect, respect, respect, somebody you know might be having tea at the Casino.

But what could happen to a lady encased in whalebone—how long and agitating would be the delicate disrobing!—and the ride went gently on till Alec whispered an invitation to tea at his flat.

"No!" said Belle, breathing however hard. She consulted her enameled watch which had kept its strait path through time over her frantic heart. "It's nearly four. I have to get back."

Alec gave in at once. He ordered the driver to Penn Station. Belle did not like her victory as much as she certainly should have. With awful dignity she picked up her rose-laden hat and pinned it to her hastily anchored hair. All the way to Thirty-fourth Street Alec made urbane small talk, sitting cool beside her in the crackling cab. Belle said nothing, nor did Alec seem to expect this of her; for the second time today she was remembering Dr. Berlinger of Bad Nauheim, wondering, wondering if what really happened had really happened once, how it would matter if she repeated herself this side of the Atlantic. But it must matter, thought Belle, it does matter. They were almost at the station when from Belle's rosy lips spoke a familiar, while Belle listened in horror.

"Alec, we might— Next time I'll have tea with you," said Belle's voice, but surely not her person. "I may get in to town next week."

"Darling," said Alec. "You know how to reach me."

Although she tilted her head, he did not touch her again save to hand her from the cab, and she had to leave him there.

15

DURING THE night, waking or sleeping, Larry pondered Alec's tip on copper, Paul Haydon's warning to sell out tomorrow. His head beat like a drum in the jungle of his dreams, but Larry awake could not understand the message of Larry asleep, and he woke still undecided what to do.

The family had not been deceived about his migraine; when he ate almost nothing at dinner his mother said that he should stay home next day. In the morning he lied and told her and his sisters he felt fine again. Only Claudie, to whom he looked to see through the lie and care for him, seemed too remote to notice him at all. Larry was disappointed, and concerned for Claudie, but when he got to Sherman's he could think only of his own indecision. Joe gave him his usual good morning, a nod over the newspaper turned to the financial reports, and appeared in no way different from every other day. So Larry went on to the room that was called the cage, where large amounts of cash were kept in drawers and in a safe that was almost always open. He greeted Taylor, hung his jacket on a coat-hanger, and assumed his disguise. He bound paper cuffs about his wrists and pulled them up to cover his shirt-sleeves almost to the elbows. He adjusted the green eyeshade to his head and pulled it far down like a mask. He climbed to a high stool beside Taylor's, took the covers off the inkwells that held red and black

ink, arranged his pens at the ready, and opened a long account book. Then he reached up and pulled the cord on a bright light overhead. He looked at the figures on the ledger, scarcely seeing them; the Curb would open soon, but he would wait a while and see what happened.

Later, when a phone call came for him, he was frightened; maybe now it would be too late to sell the stock. He sat down before the phone, holding the receiver away from his ear, and from the pain over his left eye. It was Claudie.

"Hello?" Her voice came small but distinct.

"Are you all right?" asked Larry. Spots danced before his eyes as if the figures in the ledgers had come loose and flickered between him and the world.

"Oh, I'm all right," said Claudie, her voice telling another story. "Larry, I've just made an appointment for you with Friedlander."

"I don't need to see a doctor," said Larry. He made an effort to focus his eyes, but his vision was split in two, half sliding planes of darkness, half whirling spangles.

"It's for three-thirty today," said Claudie. "After the Market closes. No one has to know where you are."

"Oh, Claudie—"

"I don't like that headache," said Claudie. "Promise me you'll go."

Larry spoke lightly.

"There's nothing the matter with me that money won't cure," he said.

"To please me," said Claudie.

"Well—all right."

"Good. Listen, Larry, I can't talk any more; ma might overhear. I have to ring off now."

Larry sat on a minute, looking at the phone, wondering again whether to sell or not, and once again he waited. Later, between one page of figures and another, he was called to the phone and asked for margin; his stock was breaking. Larry answered that he would ring back, and the broker said he'd better step on it. Then Larry, having no where else to turn, sought

Joe and found him with Aaron, both of them standing before the chittering ticker.

"Joe, they've called me for margin," said Larry, young and desperate, talking fast.

"What do you expect me to do about it?" said Joe.

"I don't need much," said Larry. "After all, you knew I was buying; they spoke to you, I know they did."

"You know a lot, don't you?" said Joe, with a kind of chill grace, a monarch dispensing justice. "You bought a dog, that's all. Now you're stuck."

Larry moved back as though he had been struck.

"But you let me buy it," he said, still not quite believing. "You could have stopped me—told me—"

"Why should I interfere? You wanted to be independent, didn't you? Then *be* independent."

Larry did not even look at Aaron, who appeared to have retired to some exclusive club, leaving behind only his J. P. Morgan face. It was understood that Aaron and Joe contributed mutually to the support of ma—whose inheritance of the cash, assets and good will of Sherman and Sons had, like her daughters', been left in the firm—but after that obligation Aaron had his own family to think of, and Joe had all the other Shermans.

"All right, Joe," said Larry very low under the pounding drum in his head.

Joe immediately resumed his place beside Aaron, not bothering to watch Larry go out. Larry went back to the cage and sat at a desk near the phone; after a while the broker called again and Larry told him he couldn't get any more margin, to go ahead and sell him out.

"Tough lines, Larry," said Mr. Taylor, not able to pretend any longer that he did not know what was going on.

Larry became a furiously angry child, in place of the timid child he had been before his brother. He answered Taylor in a loud, trembling voice:

"You know why it's tough, Taylor? Because it was so unnecessary. The great Joe Sherman!" On the periphery of his

dazzled vision, he saw a bulky shadow in the door, and said more than he meant to. "Someday I'll tell ma what her wonderful son Joe is like, don't think I won't."

Taylor, seeing Joe come in, tried to vanish into the pages of his ledger. Joe Sherman was standing over Larry.

"You run to ma, and you'll be sorry," he said. "Don't try anything with ma."

Taylor, bent over the accounts, thought he heard for once something other than brute force in Joe Sherman's voice, a hint of fear, an edge of jealousy. Larry must have felt it too, he was answering so easily.

"Try what?"

"That's all," said Joe. "Leave ma out of this."

Then Taylor was alone with Larry, and saw that Larry was taking off the paper cuffs, the green eyeshade, though it was not yet midday. He looked pale and ill, but he smiled. "Sorry about the family rowing, Taylor," he said. "I'm getting out of here now."

"Will you be back after lunch, Larry?" asked Taylor, looking at the reluctant heir-apparent of Sherman's, and wondering if he must do double bookkeeping for him today.

"Maybe yes, maybe no," said Larry. "I'll make it up to you, Mr. Taylor."

"Oh, that's all right," said Taylor, a father himself, meaning what he said.

But Larry came back, and left Sherman's only in time to get to Dr. Friedlander's. The familiar waiting room reminded him of his childhood, when Friedlander had been the family doctor, or at least the head family doctor. The room had not changed. The parquet floor reflected the shadows of the furniture in their slip covers of pale Holland linen; the etchings and the mirror over the mantelpiece glistered under their wrappings, as if hoarfrost had congealed on them. The only object in the quiet room which was not protected from summer dust and open windows was the stereopticon on its stand in the center of the

floor. A little boy kneeled on the bench before it and turned the creaking knobs. He drew back, covering first one eye and then the other, to peer in, as once Larry had done. What was he looking at—the two blurred images of the Jungfrau, the bear with her cub, the Swiss chalet? No matter; it was always magic to look at last with both eyes and see the Jungfrau, the bear with her cub, the Swiss chalet, harden into three dimensions, as if you could walk into the solid scene.

The knobs creaked; the little boy rolled up another card and made magic again.

"Gently, dear. Don't break it," said the little boy's mother over her *National Geographic*. She might have been ma talking, years ago.

Larry smiled, and for a moment forgot his headache. Then the nurse came in, and the little boy shrank and walked out with his hand in his mother's. Larry waited alone, and the darkened room seemed to shift and sparkle like a kaleidoscope which made no patterns.

A prescription in the form of a check, thought Larry, shutting his eyes, that would do, or, better, a prescription to give over making good, to quit the Street. Then the two Larrys, both true, both blurred, the young heir with millionaire's tastes, the sober young man who loved the Persian pictures, would merge, would harden into three dimensions.

"Mr. Sherman, will you come in, please?" said the nurse. She was pretty; Larry gave her the correct, polite but appreciative, look, and went down the hall.

Dr. Friedlander waited, as he always did, at the door of his office. An Olympian figure he was, in his gray frock coat, his full gray beard; he was no taller than Larry, but he seemed to look down at him, grave and kindly.

"Well, Lawrence," he said. "Sit there, will you?"

Larry took the chair opposite Dr. Friedlander's desk, and waited while Dr. Friedlander made entries on a card.

"How is mother?" asked the doctor, looking up. "No more trouble with gallstones, I hope."

"Ma's fine," said Larry.

"As long as she keeps away from rich foods she shouldn't have any trouble," said Dr. Friedlander.

Larry laughed, an unexpectedly noisy laugh.

"Ma won't diet," said Larry. "You know ma."

"The others all right?" asked Dr. Friedlander. His words were always a little thick, weighted, as if they came from a cloud. He let Larry nod, but gave him no time to answer. "Now, about these headaches—"

Larry immediately denied all headaches save the present one.

"Yes, well," said Dr. Friedlander, "we'll try to find out what's causing this. Just step into the examining room and take off your clothes."

Larry, naked upon the narrow table, defenseless against the tappings and stethescope, against the gray Jovian beard brushing his chest, was invaded by spiteful thoughts. Dr. Friedlander was only one of the army of physicians employed by his family, the specialists in whom they had or had not confidence. But Dr. Friedlander was the constant, still hired as general practitioner by the family, though now his field was neurology and psychiatry. How many times Larry had listened, half-bored, to his sisters discussing their doctors as if they were servants, with a hardy contempt mixed with superstition. Now Larry, sitting up on the table, Dr. Friedlander's gray beard against his breast, felt a spurt of anger that increased his heartbeats; Friedlander was getting old, thought Larry, maybe he wasn't competent any more.

"Breathe," said Dr. Friedlander. "In. Out."

Larry breathed as he was told, coughed as he was told, and the stethoscope moved over his chest again and again and again. Surely no examination had ever taken so long before. When Larry had been allowed to put back all his clothes save his shirt, Dr. Friedlander told him to run up and down a short flight of steps near the door.

Larry ran, frightened now, resenting the doctor who waited to try the stethoscope once more. Panting a little, Larry returned.

"Once again," said Dr. Friedlander, sitting upright on an

enamel stool, the skirts of his frock coat falling from his knees. God damn it, thought Larry, running, he's like a figure out of Noah's Ark.

Larry perched on a table, and the doctor bent to the thunder in his breast. Then he straightened up.

"Finish dressing, Lawrence, and come in."

Dr. Friedlander sat at his desk doing nothing, when Larry came in.

"What's the verdict?" asked Larry briskly.

"You can take one or two tablets for the headaches, Lawrence. I've written you a prescription. You're to drink a cup of black coffee with the medicine. I want you to make sure of that."

"Black coffee?" said Larry. "I'm so sick to my stomach when I get these migraines I can't swallow a mouthful of anything."

"You say 'these migraines,' Lawrence. How many have you had lately?"

"Maybe three in the last couple of months," said Larry. "But it's only this one that's a real lulu."

"You are bothered by something, Lawrence," said Dr. Friedlander, in a tone so kind and sure that Larry remembered he was an alienist, a man who dealt with strangers.

"Yes, of course I'm bothered," said Larry, in a burst of talk. "Who wouldn't be bothered working for Joe?"

"Joe is a hard man," said the doctor. "Is it Joe?"

"No—maybe—not really, I guess," said Larry. "It's me. I hate Wall Street; I'm no good at it—" He waited for Dr. Friedlander to speak, and when he said nothing Larry went on: "I'm going to inherit Sherman's someday. And it isn't as if I didn't like money as much as the next man. More, maybe. But sometimes I feel like saying to hell with it. I must be crazy to think of giving it up—"

"It would take a lot of courage to give it up," said the doctor. "And it might be a very foolish misuse of courage. What had you thought of doing?"

"Something damn foolish," said Larry, unable to talk about Persian miniatures.

"No need to make a decision now, surely. Now," said Dr. Friedlander in his voice from a cloud, "here is the prescription. You are to take the black coffee. These tablets depress the heart action, and coffee is a stimulant."

"Nothing wrong with my heart, is there?" asked Larry.

"You've always had a slight heart murmur, Larry."

Larry's hand went up to his forehead, as if to ward off a blow. The doctor went on:

"It's nothing serious, but we have to reckon with it. I want you to take things easier for a while. Avoid worry."

There it was, the prescription no druggist could fill: no worry, three times a day and before retiring. The two Larrys listened and smiled, and Dr. Friedlander's gaze, momentarily helpless and human, shifted to his desk.

"How is Claudia?" he asked.

"Not too good," said Larry, depressed now for Claudie as well as for himself. "Although she was fine just a few days ago."

"Well, Claudia—" said Friedlander. "We all have moods."

"I know, but Claudie's moods—"

Dr. Friedlander looked withdrawn and thoughtful, but then he smiled at Larry.

"With Claudie the pendulum swings a little too far each way," he said.

This was such a roundabout and even poetic way of describing Claudie's troubles, that Larry felt comforted. He moved through the hall sheltered by the doctor's presence, feeling, he told himself, better already.

"Look in again in two weeks," said Dr. Friedlander. "And remember the black coffee."

16

"WHERE IS everybody?" Mrs. Sherman woke from her restless afternoon nap saying this out loud. The house was too quiet; Mrs. Sherman heaved herself from her bed and strode into the hall. All the doors were shut.

"Where is everybody?" said the old lady, putting on her glasses the better to see no one. The large maternal figure stood there, in undergarments of queenly silk and purple brocade, abundant and solid. "Claudie, Minnie, Belle, Emma—"

"Here, ma," her daughters answered from their hiding places.

Mrs. Sherman flung open the door of Minnie's room. Minnie jumped.

"You all right, mama?" asked Minnie, rising from the table where she had a sheet of writing paper freshly headed, and a heap of torn-up false starts.

"I must have eaten something," said Mrs. Sherman irritably.

"That rich *Schnecken*," said Minnie.

"Nonsense!" said the old lady. "Who you're writing to?"

"Just a few lines to Flo, ma," said Minnie, smiling humbly. "Nothing wrong in that, is there?"

"You tell Flora I said she should behave herself, you hear me?"

In her room, Belle heard, too, and felt somehow that ma addressed her. Ma banged the door of Minnie's room behind

her, and Belle's hand trembled a little. Belle was melting a ribbon of wax over a spirit lamp; while the wax softened, Belle examined her face in an enlarging mirror on her dressing-table. She noted the signs of mortality, lavender shadows under her eyes, a hint of change about the jaw, no longer one perfect line; she was thirty-seven years old, she was aging, she must die.

Tell Flora—or was it Belle?—she's to behave herself. Tea with Alec, nothing! thought Belle, testing the wax. Indeed she was not like her sister Flora who kept her life in two compartments, pleasure in one compartment, punishment in another; Flora would have gone to tea, Flora had gone to Europe, Flora had got away from the family. Belle lifted the ribbon of hot wax with the tips of her fingers, and, using the hateful mirror, applied it to her upper lip. Thus adorned, she continued to stare at herself in the pool of mirror, and the hardening wax was like the years that would press her sweet flesh into wrinkles. Worst of all, it seemed to her then that she alone grew old while the rest of the world stayed still. Belle renounced Alec, thinking, he should see you now.

The wax had solidified; Belle pulled loose a corner and stripped it rapidly from her lip. She applied lotion to the smarting skin till it was soothed, and she allowed herself one more careful glance in the mirror, making sure that the wax had removed all the downy hairs which displeased her. Then she put away the spirit lamp, hid the mirror in a bureau drawer, and lay down purified, a sensible woman who faced facts.

To the sound of her mother stamping in her bedroom next door, Belle sank into sleep. She was thirty-seven years old, a good little girl, not, oh never, like Flora.

Claudie, her nerves quivering under a blanket of bromide, sat in the rocking chair by the window reading Madame Montessori. The next time she went to town she must buy Davie some approved building blocks, Barbara a new paintbox. Because surely Barbara's interest in the Persian miniature

showed a need to express herself, and it was Claudie's job to help her.

She read slowly, feeling her way by the light of Maria Montessori and duty to her children. Almost at ease in her sadness, Claudie rocked on the lap of her chair. She took off her glasses, rubbed at the sides of her nose where the clip pinched, and looked out over the lawn, a blur of green, and down inside the hollow square of hedge where the wash hung drying; she made out planes of color and identified them, Emma's gray linen, Belle's white piqué princess dress, sheets and sheets—Barbara had wet her bed last night—Theo's striped underdrawers, Carl's white madras shirts. Carl—was it this morning, or last, that he had phoned from New York to ask how she felt? And what had she answered, this morning, or was it yesterday? Claudie could not remember.

She put her glasses back and read on. Someone opened the door, looked in, and shut the door again. Claudie would not look up, but she wanted to call from the jungle where she wandered lost, "Here, I am here." But who was there to find and save her?

Ma mustn't know; her sisters agreed that ma mustn't find out what was happening. Claudie had shut the bathroom door on the tinkle of her spoon in the glass of spitting sedative, she had wept silently and murmured her threats. Hadn't she? Ma mustn't know, especially mustn't know about the black coffee Claudie had twice sneaked up the backstairs and into Larry's room. Larry was sick. Claudie came into a tiny clearing in the jungle, seeing another human being with love.

Ma suspected plenty. When Carl left his dinner almost untouched and ma asked what was wrong with the food, Carl said that he was a little under the weather. And that's an act, thought Claudie, to get sympathy.

A flutter on the lawn caught her eye; she leaned forward to see the German nurse, Frieda, tiptoe over the grass towards the barn. How do you like that! thought Claudie, but her attention wavered, fixed on Carl's shirts hanging from the wash-

line. This morning Emma had asked her to go to see Friedlander before she did something she'd regret. That must mean she'd spoken about divorcing Carl, but Claudie could not remember. She had told Emma to mind her own business, but indeed she could not remember. Alone, in the jungle, she did not think in terms of divorce, marriage, motherhood, but she must have said something. The terrible fear reached her—am I mad?

Claudie plunged into Montessori, and the tears rolled down her cheeks. She heard ma come into the hall and tread down the stairs.

"Where is everybody?" said ma, and Claudie echoed her mother's stout cry, but smothered, helpless. "Where is everybody?"

". . . scene the other night," wrote Minnie, keeping a copy of *Ranch Stories* handy. "Can't make up my mind if she's in earnest about divorcing Carl have always thought she wasn't just right. Wish you would drop her a line Flora you've always had a lot of influence on Claudie. She's in a *bad* state believe me so write to her as soon as you get this. Larry got one of his headaches and Claudie makes such a fuss about him such exageration she keeps insisting he has to have black coffee with his medicine can't tell you how she carries on. We're trying to keep it all from ma especially about Larry he's always been her favorite, of course Joe will have to know. Belle—" Here Minnie paused, considering whether or not to tell Flo about Belle and Alec. She decided not to come right out with it. "Belle," she went on, "looks fine don't know how she does it maybe it's love!"

"Minnie?" said Emma from the hall.

Minnie drew the copy of *Ranch Stories* over her letter.

"Come in," she said, and Emma opened the door.

"Minnie, do you know Simon's address in Carlsbad?" she asked.

"Carlsbad?" said Minnie. "We don't even know for sure if

he's in Carlsbad. Except he goes every summer."

"I thought maybe I missed a card he might have sent," said Emma.

"Si's address is care of American Express in Berlin," said Minnie. "He wants to make sure we can't reach him."

"That's not the way I look at it at all," said Emma. "I've written to Simon and Flo. Want me to take your letters downstairs for the post?"

Minnie rested her hand lightly on *Ranch Stories.*

"You're a smart guesser," she said. "How did you know I was writing a letter?"

"Did you think I couldn't hear ma?" asked Emma. For an instant the two sisters, who disliked each other, one for the other's slyness, one for the other's galumphing self-righteousness, agreed and commiserated on their lack of privacy. Then peace was shattered by Emma saying, "Simon asked me to keep him posted about the family."

Minnie was so irritated by this version of Simon's feeling for the family that she gave a natural laugh.

"Si doesn't care what he says!" said Minnie.

"I don't like your attitude," said Emma. As far as she was concerned, Simon and Flora were Shermans, a condition from which no one escaped, not even in Europe.

"If he really gave a damn," said Minnie, "he'd give us an address so we could reach him by cable. Supposing something happened to ma."

Emma changed the subject rather than give in.

"Ma's in a bird of a humor," she said, shaping the words distinctly and making almost no sound.

"Don't look at me," said Minnie. "I haven't told her anything."

"Did I say you had?" Emma's gray face shook. As soon as Emma had gone, Minnie wrote, "As usual Emma thinks she's better than anyone else. *Tear this up!*" she added. She put a second line under *Tear this up!,* added a second exclamation point, wrote Love, Minnie, and folded the pages.

"Where is everybody?" Mrs. Sherman thrust back the pantry door with the flat of her hand. To the sound of the flapping door, she strode into the pantry, where the waitress, cleaning silver, looked up from her task and said, "Yes, ma'am?" with no expression at all.

"Nothing," said Mrs. Sherman, and went on to the kitchen. Here Gisela, slicing a mountain of string beans for dinner, said, "Yes, ma'am?" and seemed to expect no answer. Mrs. Sherman managed a smile for her—where could you find another cook like that devil?—and retired to the front hall, defeated.

There was a batch of envelopes waiting to be mailed, set out on the hall table; all of them were stamped for Europe, and Mrs. Sherman took them up, noting that Minnie, Belle and Emma had written to Flo, and that Emma had written to Simon as well. A wave of anger took her at all she did not know about the happenings in her own house, which surely had been told in the letters to Paris and Carlsbad. More than that, she was angered by the silent revolt in which her daughters seemed banded against her. She stood irresolute in the hall, with no where to spend her lightnings. Then she heard Minnie's voice, hushed, from the children's dining room where the telephone stood. A second later Minnie cried out:

"Belle! You startled me."

"Sorry," said Belle, cool. "This your regular time to report to Joe? I wouldn't interrupt for the world."

"Why, I never—"

"Every day," said Belle. "Reporting. I wouldn't be like you—"

Mrs. Sherman was trying to listen and conceal her presence in the hall, but she was no hand at secrecy.

"What's she reporting?" roared the old lady. "What's everybody hiding around here?"

Silence. Then the daughters, as one, answered, "Not a thing, ma."

Claudie drifted into the room as if she heard nothing, saw nothing.

"Did Morton leave yet?" she said. "It's time to call for the children at the beach."

"I didn't hear him go," said Minnie.

"It's time," said Claudie again; she was still taking meticulous care of her children, but as if she were directing operations from the moon. She started to go out through the side door to call Morton, but Mrs. Sherman stepped into her path.

"Claudie, is Larry sick? He hasn't looked right for a week."

"He's had one of his headaches, ma," said Claudie. "There's nothing new about that."

"The black coffee is something new," said Mrs. Sherman. Emma came in then, and the old lady spoke to her. "Why he's drinking black coffee late at night? That boy needs his sleep."

But her four daughters, in fumbling revolt against her, had a fine excuse now to frustrate ma: they were protecting her.

"It seems to make him feel better, ma," said Emma.

"You're all keeping something from me. Don't you worry, I'll find out!" said Mrs. Sherman. Now her daughters were turning impassive faces to her; baffled and furious, Mrs. Sherman left them. She called to Morton from the porte-cochere to wait for her, she'd drive along to the beach to get the kids.

"Go to the grocer's first," said Mrs. Sherman.

"Yes, ma'am," said Morton. He started the car, and the old lady disposed herself, pocketbook on one side, pongee duster spread over most of the back seat.

"Morton."

"Ma'am?"

Mrs. Sherman spoke freely to Morton's liveried back, and she knew that he listened even if he did not in the slightest turn his head in her direction.

"What's going on?" asked Mrs. Sherman.

"I couldn't say exactly, Mis' Sherman," said Morton. "Big family like you got, Mis' Sherman, plenty bound to be happening all the time."

There was such a long silence then that it hung over Morton like a cloud; at the intersection in the village, when the policeman stopped him, Morton glanced back. The old lady gave him a real dirty look, so Morton picked what she must surely know.

"Mis' Nathan, she seem upset," said Morton.

"She's talking divorce again," said Mrs. Sherman. "As if I didn't hear her last night!"

It was Morton's turn to be silent.

"I won't allow it," said the old lady.

"Mis' Nathan get over it," said Morton. "She always get over it."

When she gets her own way, thought Mrs. Sherman, not sharing her memories with Morton. How old had Claudie been, fourteen, fifteen, when Mrs. Sherman had planned to go to Europe for a cure and a jaunt to Paris after that? She was going to take Emma and Minnie, both of them of an age to look for husbands, and leave Claudie home, but Claudie had raised such hell, even firing shoes across the room in her fury, that her mother had given in and taken her along.

"Carl ought to hit her one for luck," said Mrs. Sherman aloud, more to herself than to Morton, wishing she had had the sense to do it herself years ago.

Morton acted as if he hadn't heard; Mrs. Sherman watched his back and nodded her head in approval. Those girls must have told Morton about Claudie's scenes the last few nights; they wouldn't be human if they didn't talk. There would be no divorce for Claudie, thought the old lady again; Claudie had made a sound choice in Carl Nathan, and the marriage might have worked if it had been made in Europe, in France, with nothing light about love involved. They were alike in many ways, though both of them would have denied this. Mrs. Sherman thought of the library in the Nathan apartment, the room both of them took for granted they must have; the books everywhere they settled which blued, somehow, the air about them.

"They're both too bright," said Mrs. Sherman, aloud, but not in criticism. Morton did not budge. Morton knew plenty, and Mrs. Sherman tried again, a different way.

"How much money does Mr. Lawrence need?" she asked, making an easy guess about Larry.

"Mr. Larry needin' money?" said Morton. "Mis' Sherman, I don't believe he needs no money."

He slid the car in at the curb before the grocer's, and waited for the old lady's wrath to break over him. When she said nothing he looked back, and she was smiling.

"All right, all right!" said Mrs. Sherman. The truth was,

she liked him better for not telling what he knew; this way she could trust him absolutely.

Mr. Russo, the grocer, hurried out past the riches of summer vegetables and fruits displayed under the awnings; he touched his straw hat.

"Send me a bushel greenings," said Mrs. Sherman. "A pound and a half sweet butter. Did I order flour this morning?"

Mr. Russo went through Mrs. Sherman's morning list, which covered two pages, and said yes ma'am. Mrs. Sherman nodded and said that was all, and to deliver in time or she'd catch it from the cook. "A devil," said Mrs. Sherman comfortably. At the last minute, after Morton had the motor running, Mrs. Sherman said the peaches looked good, add a basket of those, and give her a couple to take along for the kids. She called over her shoulder as she departed that he could put in two dozen ears of corn if it was sweet. Mr. Russo mouthed sweet as sugar after she was out of earshot.

"So," said Mrs. Sherman. "Now we go to the beach."

Morton touched his hand to his cap. Mrs. Sherman settled back again, one hand, in its crocheted black silk glove, grasping a strut which held up the car's canvas top.

The road to the beach passed a few big houses set far back on plushy lawns which looked as though the inhabitants had laid out green carpets for themselves. Everywhere there were privet hedges, and the sound of shears clipping came slow and dreamlike in the summer air. Lawn mowers, pushed by Italian gardeners, played a *perpetuo mobile*, slower than life, and steadier.

"Morton, what's the hurry?" said Mrs. Sherman, and the car slowed down. "The longer those kids are away from the house, the better off they be."

Morton's rich, good-tempered laugh floated back.

The car rolled along beside the trolley tracks, past spaces where glittering poison ivy, heaped over stones and broken fences, clattered deep-green, ceramic leaves. Wild roses bloomed by the wayside, Quaker roses, all unadorned and pure, and a sudden smell of sweetness floated from a field of clover, pink,

white, purple, and from a honeysuckle vine that climbed a dead tree.

While they drove, Mrs. Sherman told Morton just what she thought of Alec Levy, a chaser, not serious, nothing for Belle; of Flora's setting off for Europe so soon after she was widowed, not decent, it doesn't look right; of Minnie—

"You got those letters from the hall table, Morton?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Morton.

"Minnie's a troublemaker," said Mrs. Sherman.

"She make any trouble, you take care of *her*," said Morton sensibly.

"That's right," said Mrs. Sherman, eased, and the two friends drove on for a while without need to talk. Then it was Morton's turn, that was only fair, and as the car passed under weeping willows, their leaves a thin shower of grief, Mrs. Sherman mentioned Frieda, the German nurse. She warned him against marrying her, although Morton had never told her that Frieda was all the time talking marriage; the old lady warned him as she might any of her children, on sensible grounds, which Morton understood and appreciated.

"It couldn't work out," said Mrs. Sherman. "You hear me, Morton? You'd be unhappy. So would the girl," added Mrs. Sherman, not that she cared about Frieda.

"That's what I keep telling her, Mis' Sherman," said Morton. "She don't seem to listen."

"She's a greenhorn," said the old lady. "In Europe it might work. But not here. You'd have children—" The old lady broke off, and then said, "Morton?"

"Oh, everything all right, Mis' Sherman," said Morton quickly.

"See that it stays that way," said the old lady. She laughed. "The first baby can come any time; after that it takes nine months."

Morton laughed with her.

There was a pause in the summer symphony as the houses were left behind, almost total stillness before the whisper and rustle of the sea was borne towards them, and the longer,

stronger arpeggios of the sea beating in as they drew near the beach. The light changed, with a heightening of tone, an intense white glare, and then, far away, showed a wash, a curve of blue.

The little girls were waiting, with Miss Wilson, on the steps of the bath-house. They climbed in, one on each side of Mrs. Sherman, and Miss Wilson took a jump-seat and pretended decently not to be there.

"I brought you some peaches," said Mrs. Sherman. "Babs, you sitting on them?"

If anyone had sat on the peaches it would be Babs; she accepted this, and rummaged at the side of the car cushion.

"Here they are, granma," said Judy, producing a paper bag.

"Look what I found, Judy. It must just have been here all the time," said Babs, and she held out the puzzle under glass, the ball bearings rolling free. She tried to work the puzzle, but gave up and ate a peach instead.

"Gimme," said Judy. "Let me try."

"Scuse me, granma," said Babs automatically, passing the puzzle around granma to Judy.

"Gently, gently," said Miss Wilson.

"*Sei doch nicht so ausgelassen*," said granma. "Here, take my handkerchief to wipe your mouths."

Babs held out her hand for the handkerchief, and, finding that her grandmother made no further move to give it to her, looked out of the car to see what granma was watching. There was an old shack, always part of the landscape till now, and a child, pale in the country air, with legs thin and bony, standing in the open doorway.

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Sherman, with a quick glance at her milk-fed, iron-fortified grandchildren.

Babs leaned in smug safety against granma's arm.

"That's a poor child, isn't she?" said Babs.

"So," said Mrs. Sherman. "At her age, I was just as poor."

"You were?" said Babs and Judy, enchanted. "Granma, tell us about it."

"Another time," said the old lady. Once again she took the

puzzle from Judy and had a try at getting the ball bearings into their places. Once again she said, "Nobody could do it." Somehow, she began to think of what was going on at home, which she did and did not know about; Claudie, Belle, Larry, moving somewhere without her knowledge, in trouble, in—danger. Nonsense! She shook the puzzle impatiently and passed it back to Judy. Babs raised her head from the old lady's suddenly stiffened shoulder, reminded, too, of danger. She studied her grandmother, looked with unblinking honesty into her grandmother's honest smile, and gradually slumped against her arm, falling half-asleep before the car rounded the circle of hydrangeas at the house.

18

FLORA WAS wafted through the lobby of the Hotel Continental on a breeze of *Bon jour, madame*'s. From the elevator to the concierge's desk, the bellboys and porters greeted her with the merest shade more warmth than in their other, customary good mornings.

"Hello, good morning," said Flora, and though she was in a hurry she paused long enough to ask about a bellboy's mother, a porter's son, and, as the concierge handed her a batch of mail, she said, "Now, Monsieur André, remember my words of wisdom." She swept the letters into her pocketbook and took out a small box tied with a pink ribbon. "You give this to Madame André, and don't answer any more questions."

Monsieur André, who had no idea how he had happened to tell Flora about his wife's discovery of a passing indiscretion (and did not care that he had told), said thank you a thousand times, madame. As this homely, enormously chic woman left the hotel he remarked to his second-in-command that one would say that Madame Rosenthal was a Frenchwoman.

Flora walked rapidly under the arcade of the rue de Castiglione, telling over her errands but not missing any response, whether of man, woman, child, or the pugdog that frowned up at her outstretched hand and wagged his corkscrew tail at her.

"What a charming dog!" said Flora, in miserable French, but with such enthusiasm that the old gentleman at the other end of the leash raised his hat and smiled.

Flora hurried along, out into the sunlight on the Place Vendôme, straight over the cobblestones towards the rue de la Paix. Once she stepped almost under the wheels of a cab, and the driver swore at her. "Oh, go to hell," said Flora, in English this time, her tone so agreeable and apologetic that the driver touched his cap and leaned out to make sure that she reached the sidewalk safely.

Her first stop was Brentano's. She went through a side-street and came out on the Avenue de l'Opéra, at the head of which the ornate and solid opera house was placed like a crown. She must find out something about the opera scheduled for tonight, but she would do that later. Flora turned into Brentano's, where she placed an order for stationery with the thinnest possible line of black, to mark the receding tides of mourning. The clerk put before her an open book of designs for monograms; the letters embraced each other inextricably, in all manner of shapes, round, oval, triangle, diamond. Flora smiled. The clerk, whose expression was adjusted to the exact month of Flora's widowhood—judging by the thin line—was surprised into smiling back.

"You are interested in a new monogram, madame?" asked the clerk, and recoiled when Flora said heartily, "I should say I am!"

She fluttered the pages of the book, looking at the temporarily forbidden dove-gray, pale blue, rose-edged white notepaper, and shut the covers over the entwined monograms. She reached into her pocketbook and took out a die engraved with her initials.

"This will do for now," said Flora. "Hold the order for me when it's ready, please. I expect to go to Carlsbad, and I'll pick it up when I get back."

"Yes, madame. Thank you very much, madame." The clerk saw Flora to the door and watched her turn up in the direction of the Opéra, observing that the black madame still wore,

the veil no more than a bit of illusion, seemed provocative and smart, even something of a joke.

Flora got to the hairdresser five minutes early, which gave her a chance to check up on the life and loves of the cashier, whom she had not seen since last week. Michel, the proprietor, left a client to greet her with a handshake.

"Get me out of here on time, Michel," said Flora. "I can't be late to lunch."

"You may count on me, Madame Rosenthal," said Michel. He hurried to finish with the client ahead of Flora, and then hung up Flora's hat, tied a blue linen cape about her shoulders, and removed the pins from Flora's black hair. He began to brush her thick, rather short hair, looking at her in the mirror as he did so. He commented tactfully on the luminous glow of her skin, the brightness of her eyes, saying only that madame looked very well; Michel could remember Flora at another time, or was it more than once, when her complexion had been tinged with yellow as if with a mild jaundice, and her hair did not retain its wave no matter what he tried.

Flora leaned forward to the mirror.

"I'm going to need a touch-up soon, Michel," she said. "See that you wave my hair so the roots don't show."

Michel picked up a curling-iron from the gas-flame, spun it, touched it lightly, set it back.

"I give you the touch-up next week, perhaps," he said.

"Perhaps, nothing," said Flora. She laughed her cheerful, husky laugh. "You know me. I'm going to my grave with black hair. Michel, tell me something about the singers at the opera tonight. It's a gala. They're doing *Samson and Delilah*."

"Ah, a beautiful opera, they say," said Michel.

"It could have been worse," said Flora.

"You will be there, madame?"

"I suspect so," said Flora. "I'm still in mourning, of course, but it's not like going to the theatre. I won't be tempted to go to theatre here anyway, my French is so poor." She laughed again. "Come on, Michel, I may be meeting some of the singers later. Tell me about them."

Michel knew the mezzo-soprano who was singing Delilah; she had come to him at one time, and she was a woman who worked hard at her art, leaving only her life to chance. Through her, Michel had heard about some of the other singers, and he told Flora what he knew.

"Thanks, Michel. I like to have something to say—I'm such an idiot I never heard of most of them."

A woman with her hair freshly put up, holding her head as straight as if she were trying to balance it on her neck, tiptoed to Flora's side.

"Excuse me," she said, "but aren't you a Sherman? I used to know Claudie at college."

Flora chatted with her a minute, and when the woman left she told Michel in a proud but seemingly resigned way that wherever they went someone always knew the Shermans. Then she remembered. "I'm a bird! I got some letters this morning, and I never even opened them."

She took the envelopes out of her bag; the writing on all of them was similar, large, hurried, rolling over the paper. Flora began to read and became very still, turning her head like a doll at Michel's convenience. Her brown eyes, which popped from her lids somewhat like the pugdog's, met Michel's through a veil of crisp hair in which the wave was holding.

"Nothing but trouble," she said. "They must have been afraid I was enjoying myself." The irons rattled, and Flora settled under the blue linen cape till it hung about her like mourning weeds.

Michel was distressed to see that, though her skin remained glowing, a jaundiced mood had overcast her usual good spirits. Madame Rosenthal could win everybody, by flattery, wit, or both, or simply the heat of the day, for Madame was at midday now. What had her family written to disturb her?

Flora would have been glad to tell Michel, it might have made her feel better; she didn't think of doing so. Emma had come right out with it, after her recital of Larry and Belle by day and Claudie by night, saying that Flora was the only one who could reason with them and she ought to come home;

she could enjoy Europe another year. Maybe I should go home, thought Flora, with the guilt on her. But it was not her time for guilt; when it was, she was overwhelmed by guilt, which she appeased by getting caught or devoting herself to the family, but never by spoiling her fun. She took time out for punishment, after which she returned to her pleasures. She thrust the letters back into their envelopes and into her pocketbook, worrying about duty. Then, to her surprise, she gave a yawn as of unutterable boredom. If she went on like this she would be late for lunch.

"What time is it, Michel?" she asked at once, raising her head so that Michel had to re-aim the final pin in her psyche knot. "Quarter to one? I'll have to fly." Michel held a hand-mirror to show madame, madame happily restored, the back of her coiffure. "That's grand, Michel. I look almost human."

She was on the dot. Max Dreyfus was just giving his hat to the vestiaire when she walked into the entrance of *Lapérouse.*

"Ah, my dear Flora," said Max, in that tone she knew was meant to be humorous. He kissed her hand, pivoted on one foot, and followed the waiter only after he had made sure that he was getting a good table, against the wall in the first room of the ancient restaurant. Flora followed Max, amused and rather pleased to be treated so cavalierly.

"I love this place," she said, while Max arranged the chair beneath him, the silver before him, with military precision.

"You've been here before?" he asked, seeming annoyed.

"Oh, no, never!" said Flora. "I meant I liked the small rooms. I'll bet the food's delicious."

Max was studying the menu, but he smiled a bit. He took off his glasses, breathed on them, cleaned them slowly on a spotless white linen handkerchief, put the handkerchief back in his pocket, the glasses back on his nose, and resumed his deliberations. At his side, a waiter stood motionless.

"Toast with marrow," Max said finally, "the toast not too brown. *Bifteck saignant*—very rare, you understand—and a salad. I will make the dressing."

"Max, you're spoiling me," said Flora, and again he smiled.

He addressed himself to the wine card, while the wine steward stood at attention. Both men discussed the wine seriously, and Flora watched. Max was a lawyer; he had taken his law degree at Columbia, but his parents had sent him to Germany for his earlier education and even now Max was quite European in the way he lived. He wore a small pointed moustache, his face had a severe but puffy look, and he resembled no Sherman ever. His habitual expression of bad-temper and confidence suited Flora so well that she seldom noticed them. They had been friendly some time ago, before her husband's protracted final illness interrupted Flora's life. He surprised her now with a glance intimate and harsh.

"Max!" said Flora, with complete comprehension and pleasure.

"I don't want to see that veil again, my dear," he said. "Black is always smart, but the veil is quite inappropriate under the circumstances."

Flora took a hatpin and fastened the offending veil back out of sight, deciding that she'd wear it only when she was sure not to run into Max. She had, however, no intention of giving in about what Max Dreyfus called the circumstances; he was insistent that they be married in less than a month, at the home of some German cousins in Berlin. Flora knew, and Max did not, that marrying Flora before her year of mourning her first husband was up, and before he had met any member of her family, would make Max feel triumphant even if he could never acknowledge this to himself. Flora, more gently than Max, though as firmly, insisted they must wait until the fall; there was just no sense getting everybody sore at them, especially Joe.

She tried to change the subject by praising the wine.

"It's fair," said Max. Max was maybe a bit Teutonic, but so different from her weakling first husband. "I've got tickets for the opera tonight."

"Grand!" said Flora. "I'm crazy about *Samson and Delilah.*"

"So you looked up what was playing," said Max. "I like that. The French can't stage opera, but I promised I'd put in an

appearance." One of Max's clients, from the Met in New York, was conducting tonight.

Lunch proceeded in an atmosphere of pre-familial good-feeling, until their waiter brought the salad. He set down a bowl of endive and escarole, cruets of vinegar and olive oil, salt, pepper-mill, and mustard. Max frowned at the Dijon mustard.

"*Dry* mustard!" he said impatiently. "Take this away and bring me dry mustard."

The waiter asked his pardon, snatched away the moist mustard and returned with the dry. But then Max, rising to his feet so as properly to confect the dressing, found fault with the olive oil, the vinegar, and the service. At this the waiter brought the maître d'hôtel, who received what remained of Max's complaints. Flora suffered. Finally they ate the salad.

"Really!" said Max.

"Really is right," said Flora, in a noncommittal tone.

After Max had paid, leaving a somewhat meager tip considering his behavior, they left the restaurant. On the street outside, Flora said oh, dear, she'd just like to stop in the ladies' room, and Max leaned on his cane in an attitude of exaggerated patience. She ran in and handed out large tips to the waiter, the wine steward, the maître d'hôtel, saying she was sorry, everything had been perfectly served and delicious and they knew what people are. She went into the ladies' room, pulled out the hatpin and let the bit of veil fall into place and that damn Prussian could like it or lump it.

The damn Prussian was looking at books in a stall on the *quai*. He made no comment on the veil, suggested that she take a late tea as they would have supper after the opera, and said he'd call for her at eight o'clock. He handed her into a cab and went back to the bookstall.

"Oh, go to hell!" said Flora, a great deal less mildly than she had said it to this morning's taxi-driver. "Grande Maison de Blanc, *s'il vous plaît*," she corrected the address. Max was impossible, and he'd never change.

But it would be foolish to pass up meeting the singers after the opera tonight.

19

MAX LOOKS, thought Flora, outside the Opéra, as if he owned the place. She walked slowly beside him, holding the train of her rose-red dress wrapped about her legs in a rich swirl; her Indian net stole, enough protection in the warm night, swung a little as she moved, its ends weighted with a design of silver beaten into the meshes; Max, the stubborn Dutchman, had not even mentioned her appearance, though she knew how little he missed. No matter; this was Max's swan song, she had told herself earlier, hooking up the new dress from Doucet. She had bought the dress with Aaron's bon voyage present, a check, "a little something extra for Paris"; it was a dress she should not have worn for another six months, if then, but anything so becoming had to be all right.

Max's hand, in its white glove, touched Flora's arm, but she would not allow herself any response to that. They went through the marble entrance, the shabby-splendid corridor behind the orchestra, and down the aisle to their seats. Max or no Max, Flora felt as fine as she ever had in her life. She let her train sweep behind her, catching over the red carpet and rippling after her.

Their seats were in the sixth row center. Max opened Flora's program for her, put a monocle in his eye and read his own program, commenting on the tenor, the soprano, the conductor

who was his client. "The Maestro asked us to supper later," he said. "Oh, I'd love to go!" said Flora. "I told Maestro I didn't think we could join him," said that damn Max. Before Flora could try to talk him round, he went right on, reading his program at the same time, saying that of course she must know she was angry at him about nothing. Flora was startled; she thought she had concealed her anger this afternoon. Now, enjoying herself, she began to be afraid that Max might not forgive her behavior, and she enjoyed the fear, too, and kept her expression solemn.

"Couldn't we discuss it later, Max?" she said.

"There is nothing to discuss, my dear," said Max. "The waiter was at fault. When I pay for the best, I expect the best."

Three loud raps sounded from one side of the stage, and the assorted noises of the orchestra tuning up came to a stop. The lights were lowered, the conductor appeared, bowed briskly to the applause, and immediately began the overture. Max and Flora said no more to each other, which Flora felt was just as well. Sometimes she listened, but more often her thought was like a shuttlecock, spinning, feathered and light as air, from past to future, Long Island to Paris, ma, Claudie, Belle, Emma, Joe, to all the Shermans and back to Max, to the glowing stage before her, to Max again and sometimes to the opera. In some act far off there was a famous duet she would recognize; meantime the singers gasped, gave sudden hoots and yells, talked rapidly without benefit of music, and always remembered to cast businesslike looks at the conductor. Opera! thought Flora, without moving.

At the intermission, Max stood up and surveyed the house, considering the occupants of the boxes at his leisure. He did not speak to Flora. At the next intermission, though, he strolled with her to the buffet and they drank champagne. Max introduced her to a colleague from New York, and Flora came to the surface of herself, saying she didn't know a thing about music—except that she adored it—and wouldn't someone please tell her about Saint-Saëns. The colleague was charmed, and

told Flora a good deal more than she wanted to know.

During the fourth act, when Max hadn't said one word about going to supper with the Maestro, Flora began to wonder why she was sitting out the skirt of a new dress to please a man who hadn't even mentioned it. She wasn't enjoying herself any more; she began to think about hanging up the dress as soon as she got back to the hotel, and then she'd write home to ma and the family. Maybe she would sail a little early, at that.

Lord, what a long opera this was! But then, at last, Samson felt his blind way to the pillars, shook his shorn locks, heaved, panted, and brought down the Temple. Max turned to Flora stately, as to a stranger, and said they would go to the greenroom to see the singers. They made their way backstage in the midst of a crowd of people.

The greenroom was hot, airless, packed. Max was separated from Flora, and she followed him. She was surrounded by strangers, and she smiled, beginning to come alive. In the center of a ring of elegant ladies and gentlemen stood Delilah, a short, plump woman, pearled with sweat under her thick make-up; her eyes seemed to be looking always beyond the shoulder of the person she talked to, although her manner was gracious. She kissed Max, Flora noticed, coming up to them through the mob, like a queen bestowing a decoration. Max presented Flora.

"Oh, you sang so wonderful!" said Flora. "I was really—no, I tell you I had tears in my eyes."

"Thank you," said Delilah. She had been looking beyond Flora until Flora spoke. Now she turned to her. "Oh, you are *Flora!* Max, you have not told me enough how charming she is."

Max gave a small nod and smile, and took Flora's arm.

"Max," called Delilah, "you will bring madame to tea with me."

They made the rounds, and Flora told each and every singer how wonderful their voices were; the tenor kissed her, the Maestro kissed her.

Flora looked at these big, eager, gifted children, and was at home as never before in her life. Max took her to supper with them, to a simple restaurant where they ate and drank largely and let Flora tell them again about the fine voice they had all been in.

"Where you are staying, Madame Flora?" asked Delilah. "The Continental? So far away from Max!"

Flora looked at Max and they both began to laugh. During their misunderstanding—or understanding! thought Flora—they had behaved to each other as if they had only their public selves to reckon with. Then and there, in this good company, Flora made up her mind to marry Max in Berlin, as he wished, though there was nothing in her manner to show him she had changed since this afternoon.

They left soon after, and Max came to her sitting room—she had permitted herself the luxury of a suite because she couldn't think how else to arrange matters—for a brandy. Flora took a nightcap too, though she said she'd have *Katzenjammers* tomorrow, and she asked Max to explain how a German performance of the opera would have been better than tonight's. After which she told him frankly that she was so dumb she didn't see how a brilliant man like himself would want to have her around.

"You are a very clever woman, my dear Flora," said Max.

"Me? Nonsense," said Flora, somewhat alarmed.

"We'll be married in Berlin," said Max.

"God knows what the family will say."

"You are quite clever enough to talk them around," said Max. "Including that brother of yours who's going to leave you money."

Flora shrugged her shoulders.

"Max, don't you like my dress? You haven't said a word about it."

"Stand up and let me see it," said Max. He turned on the lights in the chandelier and looked at her under the blaze. "Very nice."

Flora moved slowly till she had gone full-circle and was

facing him again.

"Now come here," said Max.

He was as eager for her as she for him, but he would not let her know it. He stood waiting for her to come to him across the room; when she did, he kissed her mouth lightly, and sat down. Flora sighed with pleasure, and did not much mind when he finished his brandy, kissed her again, and said he must go now, he would ring her in the morning. Max integrated her; he was the punishment she must sometimes suffer, and the pleasure she must enjoy.

20

BEANIE HAD been lying in the upstairs hall most of the morning, waiting for Claudie's door to open. Once it had, but Carl had been too quick for him, holding him off while he shut the door. Now the dog was spread right out, forepaws north, hindpaws south, his muzzle resting westward, on one leg. Mr. Beck had stepped over him, the old lady had shooed him outdoors, but he had got back in and remained at his post.

Davie clambered down the stairs one step at a time, holding to the rungs of the banister and to his nurse's hand. When he saw Beanie he let go and ran to the dog, bending and then falling right over on to Beanie. Beanie did not stir; when Davie kissed him between the eyes Beanie's short tail wagged slightly.

"*Pfui!*" said the nurse, catching Davie up in her arms. Davie watched the dog settle himself more firmly on the floor and suddenly hugged his nurse.

Beanie waited, no less alert because his lids were half-closed over his pop-eyes. Nearly two years ago, Carl had opened his front door, whistled up his wife and kids, and, holding both hands behind his back, addressed them.

"Say something in Arabic," he had said.

"Kazam!" cried Babs, and waited for cocoanut bars. But this time it was a Boston bull puppy, brindled and white, who wet the carpet the minute Carl put him down.

"That's all I needed!" Claudie had said, but she got a damp rag and wiped up the puddle herself. The puppy squatted on his hind legs among the shoes, among the smells of strange people, of leather, wool, wood, and street dirts, and close to the smell of his own puddle. Claudie went at her unaccustomed task, and the pup sniffed in a straight line right to her fingers, then he put his tongue out and tasted delicately, and licked her hand.

Beanie, more than two years old now, heard the little girls call to him from the lawn. His ears rose and settled back against his head. *Mutter*, the honey-colored cat, oozed around him, sniffing at his ear, and at the depression in the top of his skull. Beanie growled at her, and *Mutter* dashed once, twice, up and down the hall, sprang to the newel-post, to the middle of the stairs, and vanished.

Minnie came out of her room, listened at Claudie's door, and turned the knob softly. She opened the door just wide enough to peer into the shadowed room, but Beanie drew in his ribs and got past her. "Ts!" said Minnie, and shut the door.

Beanie circled the bed where Claudie lay; his nails clattered on the floor but Claudie did not wake. Beanie jumped to Carl's bed, walked over the pillow to the table between the beds and sniffed at the clouded empty glass. He tried settling down on the cool sheets, but his white forehead was wrinkled, and his eyes started from their sockets as he watched his too-quiet mistress. He jumped down, clattered over the floor, and sprang to Claudie's bed.

She moaned, and opened her eyes to find Beanie's face almost touching hers.

"Oh, damn it," she said, "who let you in?"

She brushed him off the bed, but Beanie danced at her side, tail up, head up, ears up. He gave a short bark.

Claudie rose from her drugged sleep, reaching for her glasses as she sat up. Beanie barked a second time.

"Claudie," said Minnie, having opened the door again, "I'll get him out of here."

Claudie did not answer, or even turn towards her sister. She picked up her kimono and pulled it about her.

Minnie ran in and bent to catch hold of Beanie, who was under Carl's bed by the time she got there. Claudie went into the bathroom and shut the door. Minnie began to call Beanie in a very friendly voice.

Beanie growled.

"Aunt Minnie," said Babs, from the hall. "Well—uh—Aunt Minnie—" She walked into the room and backed against the drawn shade which glowed with the wave of sunlight beating behind it. "Is Beanie here?" asked Babs, looking at the clouded glass beside her mother's bed.

"You get him downstairs," whispered Minnie. "Your mother's a little nervous today."

Babs did not move. Suddenly Beanie scrambled out from under the bed and rushed past Minnie.

"Oh!" cried Minnie. Then she remembered to whisper. "That dog isn't safe. Someday he'll bite somebody, and then—"

The bathroom door was flung open and Claudie's dazzled look took in everything and nothing.

"Stop putting ideas in that child's head, Minnie." Claudie walked past Minnie to the bureau, picked up her brush and comb, put them down, permitted Babs to murmur "Good morning, mother" and kiss her cheek. "All right, all right," said Claudie. "Barbara, why aren't you out in the fresh air?"

Beanie appeared at the top of the stairs, followed by Davie, who was climbing on hands and knees. Claudie faced her son. She turned to a window, pulled up a blind, called into the sunlight.

"Lena! *Kommen sie sofort nach oben.*"

Davie's blue eyes were as big as cartwheels; he stood up and walked across the room to this stone mother, grabbed her kimono, and, smelling Djer Kiss talcum powder, Pear's soap, and the flesh of home, he sobbed, opened his mouth and howled.

Lena, half-bending, scuttled across to pick up Davie. She

whispered that she was sorry, and Claudie told her if she wasn't fit to take the responsibility of watching Davie—"I can't do everything," said Claudie.

Lena stood upright, holding the baby; she bowed without further apology, and left the room.

Claudie faced the mirror and began to brush her hair. In the glass, a crooked Minnie, a pale Babs, watched her.

"Oh, leave me alone!" said Claudie. Her voice broke. "Barbara, take that dog with you."

Beanie's ears drooped, his tail drooped, he was a half-moon of sorrow. Babs carried him downstairs to the lawn, where only the dog, of all that household, could hear Claudie weeping. He leaped against the screen door, scratched hard at it, lay down under an oak tree and seemed to doze.

Mutter approached him over the grass, touched the dent in the top of his skull with her whiskers, paused. When Beanie did not growl, *Mutter* stiffened her legs, arched her back, jumped three times widdershins, puffed out into a bubble of light on the grass. Then she folded her front paws under her, and fixed her round gold eyes on Beanie's head where the hair grew crooked.

A summer ago, Beanie had run out into the road before the house, and a car hit him. He was too hurt to whimper, and lay silent on Claudie's lap in the auto while Morton drove them to the vet in the village. Transferred to the oilcloth-covered table, Beanie breathed lightly, gasped, panted, while the doctor touched the bleeding wound in his head. "Fractured skull," said the vet to Claudie. "Nothing to be done. It won't hurt him while I put him out." Even with half his reflexes gone, Beanie felt the stillness widen about him as he lay abandoned on the table. Then Claudie's fingers came close enough for him to smell her. "Like hell you'll put him out," said Claudie. She picked up Beanie and told Morton to drive to the next village, four miles away. The vet there said maybe, and after three weeks in the hospital and four months while the paralyzed rear legs grew slowly stronger, Beanie was as good as new except for the dent in the top of his skull.

Suddenly Beanie's ears flickered; he stood up. He ran a short way forward, till he stood beside *Mutter*, now loosened to twice her length sleeping all over the grass. Beanie gave her a perfunctory sniff, moved on and lifted his leg against the oak tree, found an attractive scent under the hydrangeas, began to raise his leg again and instead ran straight up the porch steps to the door.

Two minutes later Claudie came out, carrying the book by Madame Montessori. She sat down in a rocker and opened to her page. Beanie's nails clattered over the boards to her side. He sat down in front of her, waiting. "Come here, old Beanie," she whispered at last, and her hand caressed the healed wound in his head.

21

On the porte-cochere, the little girls were being inspected for general neatness, condition of hair ribbons, pocket handkerchiefs, buckskin shoes (white), and identical Alice-blue linen dresses. Judy looked mildly desperate while her mother fussed with the bow atop her black hair; Babs tugged away from Claudie and stamped her foot.

"Oh, mother!" said Babs. "You'd honestly think we were going to be presented to all the crowned heads of Europe."

Claudie laughed, but did not sound amused.

"You're not so far off," she said. "All right, now, Barbara, it's not as funny as all that. I want you to remember to curtsey."

"Yes, your Majesty," said Babs, bowing like the peers of England at the coronation of George V. She turned as Morton brought the car around, flung wide the door, and said, "Her Majesty's carriage awaits without."

"Come on, come on," said Mrs. Sherman, slapping open the screen door. "Babs, stop that fooling." She climbed into the auto and sat stately, a granddaughter on either side. Everybody waved as if this were to be a long parting, though they were only driving to the North Shore to take lunch with Aunt Janet.

Still, there was something out of the ordinary about this visit; Mrs. Sherman had been to the Aaron Shermans' only three weeks ago, and usually she allowed six weeks between calls, for

recovery. The old lady had sprung the news at dinner last night, and she had been almost as surprised as her children to hear her plans. But after dinner had been only picked at by Carl, Claudie, Belle, and scarcely tasted by Larry, Mrs. Sherman made her decision and announced it simultaneously. After which she asked a question, answered herself, and added a comment.

"What's wrong with the food? It's delicious. The way you're all behaving it's an insult to the cook."

The culprits said they just didn't happen to be hungry, except for Larry who seemed not to have heard her. Mrs. Sherman thought back to the morning when she had considered the calm of her household. "I knew it was too good to last!" she said out loud. She was impatient with these invisible troubles, and more than impatient over Larry, too pale, too quiet, out of her reach. Maybe Aaron knew something; she would go tomorrow and ask his wife.

"Who's coming with me?" she asked.

"Don't look at me, ma," said Emma, her head trembling. "I went to the cemetery with you—"

There was a shout of laughter in which Mrs. Sherman managed not to join. Instead she looked cross. "That will do," she said, and Emma, who hadn't meant to be funny, laughed in spite of herself.

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded, ma," said Emma. "But I suggested going the other day, and you nearly took my head off."

Mrs. Sherman did not explain her change of heart; she waited to hear who was going with her. Minnie offered her the little girls.

"Take Babs and Judy, why don't you?" said Minnie. "Miss Wilson can have the afternoon off."

"It's her afternoon off anyway," said Emma.

"That will do!" said Mrs. Sherman. "See that those kids are ready by half-past ten tomorrow."

It had been Emma's job, then, to phone her sister-in-law and ask if she would be free for lunch tomorrow. This was a matter

of form; Mrs. Sherman had said to tell Janet to expect them at twelve to twelve-thirty. Janet's refined, hesitant voice had answered almost at once that she would be delighted to see Mrs. —to see ma. Emma inquired as she could for the health of the Aaron Shermans and their baby, while the old lady stood at her side ordering her to tell Janet not to bother to have anything special, not to make any fuss—

"Ma, for heavens' sakes!" said Emma, hanging up. "I couldn't hear Janet at all."

"You talk a blue string," said Mrs. Sherman. Then she brought Larry a cup of black coffee to his room; now that her daughters had finally told her that Dr. Friedlander prescribed this for Larry with his medicine she felt more disturbed than before. She put the coffee down on Larry's bed-table. "Friedlander always was a *Stoffel*," she said. Larry smiled. "I won't need that tonight, ma, thanks," he said. "My headache's cleared up." "I'll just leave it here anyway, darling," said Mrs. Sherman, and Larry thanked her again.

Down on the porch Emma was saying she wished ma'd do some of her own phoning, once in a way. "She's got something in mind," said Emma, and the others nodded.

After breakfast this morning Babs and Judy had been done up and over, from Anderson ginghams clean enough to wear to the beach to the linen dresses in which they now sat stiffly to right and left of their silent grandmother. Judy tried out a series of questions whose answers did not interest her; she just wanted granma to say anything. Babs had given up long ago, and was pretending to drive the machine, alternately tensing and relaxing the muscles of her arms and legs, and sometimes pressing her right foot hard on the floor to give it the gas. Maybe she could sit up front with Morton on the way home.

"Granma, is Dorothy my first cousin?" asked Judy, speaking of Aunt Janet's and Uncle Aaron's baby, born after eight years of marriage.

"Of course," said Mrs. Sherman.

"Well, but not like Babs, for instance, is my first cousin, or Susan, say, or—"

"Dorothy's a Sherman," said the old lady, as who should say Hanover. "You're both Shermans, but on your mothers' side."

Babs and Judy regarded her gravely.

"Yes-s-s . . ." said Babs.

"Well, then," said Mrs. Sherman.

"You mean our mothers' name was Sherman before they got married," said Babs, not asking a question but explaining the matter to herself.

"That makes Dorothy Sherman our first cousin," said Judy.

It seemed believable until the car turned in at a gate, passed the gardener's cottage, a reach of shellacked rhododendron bushes, a stretch of pine woods, a formal garden with a mixed pattern of summer flowers, beyond which was a rose garden, and came at last to the house, large, low and beautiful, picked out with open shutters painted green, near the top of each of which was a star-shaped cutout.

Before the car drew up at the steps, Aunt Janet came out on the porch. Granma pushed Babs before her, and hauled herself out assisted by Morton and Aunt Janet. She kissed Janet's cheek, untied her veil, and requested that Babs and Judy be shown where the toilet was. "It's a long drive," she said, over the shamefaced Babs and Judy.

"I did have to go, though," said Judy, when they had locked themselves into the downstairs washroom.

"I couldn't hardly wait," said Babs, "but granma sort of announced it."

A maid was waiting outside to show them where to go, and when they got to the screened porch granma sent them to see the baby who was sleeping in her carriage in the shade of a big oak. The baby, under the embroidered piqué cover, opened her eyes, looked at them unseeing, and fell asleep again. Babs and Judy, feeling snubbed, edged around a capped and uniformed nurse who seemed to watch them sharply.

"I bet you she's not our first cousin," whispered Babs, while they walked away as if on eggs.

"Granma said she was," said Judy.

"Anyway," said Babs.

They had got to the rose garden, all pink red and yellow blooms, and green and deep-red leaves, awash with perfume, drowned under gold sunlight.

"Gee," said Babs. She approached a bush and bent over to smell a great, honey-colored cabbage rose big enough for Aunt Janet to have found Dorothy under it. She smiled, wondering vaguely how did babies get out of their mothers, moved and found her dress held fast by thorns.

"Wait a minute!" said Judy, too late. Babs had pulled back, alarmed, and now her skirt was snagged, and the rose bush shook furiously.

A waitress came to call them for lunch, and they took their places at the table. Babs and Judy were quiet and didn't know how to break through into just being; their voices might have squeaked if they had tried. But the funny thing was that granma was quiet, too, and so was Aunt Janet but maybe she was always like that. The whole place was very quiet, really, the light, yellow-papered dining room, the big house, the gardens; wealth, well-spent, spread like oil over the choppy waters of human personality, stilling everything.

Neither Babs nor Judy made a move until both their elders had moved. They opened their napkins on cue, picked up their forks on cue, nibbled delicately at crackers which might be noisy. They had cold tomato soup, a cheese omelet, green peas and salad, and evcrything was good but so usual that the little girls began to feel safe and even expansive.

"Delicious," said Mrs. Sherman, while the maid crumbed the table. She had been waiting to ask Janet her questions until after lunch; now she wondered if she could get anything out of her. She did not know her daughter-in-law at all, and found little recognizable in Janet's smoothed-out behavior, her good but shapeless wash-dress which Mrs. Sherman dismissed as Dutchy. She repeated firmly, "Delicious."

"Thank you," said Janet, intimidated as always by her hearty mother-in-law. In her turn, Mrs. Sherman was intimidated by the chill which concealed Janet's fright; Mrs. Aaron Sherman's plain but kindly face was frosty and remote.

The waitress brought in dessert—peaches from the orchard. Judy gave Babs a cautious kick under the table, and Babs kicked her back. They were intimidated by the knife and fork for fruit, the like of which they had never seen. What a struggle it was, not touching the peach with your hand, cutting the peeled, slippery object and yet keeping it from sliding right to the tablecloth. Babs almost yawned with exhaustion after she had managed to eat two-thirds of the luscious fruit.

"Pick it up and finish it, darling," said granma, who had eaten her peach the usual way, but Babs was too shy. Aunt Janet came from a good family in Cincinnati, maybe that explained the fruit knife and fork.

When coffee was served, Mrs. Sherman told the kids to get outside into the fresh air. Then she asked Janet point blank what was going on between Carl and Joe. Her lack of tact and reserve so unnerved Janet that, without meaning to, she told the old lady what she knew, that Carl had asked Joe for a loan.

"He can't handle the business where he is," said Mrs. Sherman, who kept up with what concerned her children. "Nothing wrong with that."

Janet raised her honest brown eyes to her mother-in-law, and blurted out, "Ma, Mrs. Sherman, Joe hasn't answered Carl yet, one way or the other."

"Why not?"

Janet put some of her bewilderment at the family she had married into in her answer. "That's what I don't know." But she did know. "Aaron says Carl has plenty of security. It's awful to keep anyone waiting like that."

"So that's it," said Mrs. Sherman.

Janet nodded. She spoke of herself in another's name. "It's especially hard on a man like Carl. I mean, Joe—"

But Mrs. Sherman had heard the implied criticism in Janet's words. So did Janet, and she blushed painfully. Aaron had repeated the story to her with no sign of any feeling, as though these men bore no relationship to him, least of all that of one human being to another.

"Please don't tell Aaron I told you," said Janet.

"Of course I won't," said Mrs. Sherman. She went with Janet to see her newest grandchild. They passed through a sitting room where Janet showed her the celadon bowl she had filled with bachelor's buttons and forget-me-nots; it was the loveliest thing in the whole house, thought Janet, but her mother-in-law just said "Very nice" and walked on. Then Mrs. Sherman tried to find out about Larry, but Janet said she knew nothing, and now these two had an afternoon to get through together until Aaron came home.

22

GRANMA HAD finally gone upstairs to take a rest. Babs and Judy kept the front porch in view, though they were far away, wading in brown pine needles under the fir trees.

"You know what?" said Judy. "Aunt Janet's so polite you can't really tell anything about her."

"I can tell you one thing," said Babs. "She's not a Sherman. She's better."

"Why do you think it's better for Jews to come from Cincinnati than New York?" said Judy.

"Well, it is," said Babs. "Everybody's stuck-up here, even the baby." But then she looked across to the rose garden and saw Aunt Janet with a shapeless straw hat on top of her head cutting flowers and putting them into a basket on her arm. She didn't look stuck-up one bit; she looked soft and loving. For one tiny moment, Babs felt shamed.

"Oh, look," said Judy, "there's Uncle Aaron. Let's keep out of sight till they call us."

Babs was already behind a wide-spread spruce tree. The little girls peeked from behind their green-smelling spruce, and saw granma and Aunt Janet come out on the porch.

Aaron kissed his mother's cheek, and then his wife's. Mrs. Sherman was out of patience, what with the long afternoon waiting for Aaron to come home and the minor information she

had learned from Janet. She demanded forthwith to know what was wrong with Larry. "Well?" she said, when Aaron did not answer at once.

"He looked all right at the office, ma," said Aaron, calm behind his spreading moustache. "Janet, have you seen to some fruit and vegetables for mother to take with her?"

Janet excused herself, and went indoors straight to the celadon bowl where she held her hands over the bachelor's buttons and forget-me-nots as if to warm them. Everything was prepared for Mrs. Sherman, but she knew that Aaron wanted to be alone with his mother. Through the net window curtains she could see out to the porch, where Aaron had turned to his mother as if a stranger had left them.

"Ma, Larry's got extravagant tastes," she heard Aaron say, and Janet knew it was wrong, but she listened. "He's always had extravagant tastes."

"I suppose you haven't," said Mrs. Sherman.

"I can afford them," said Aaron.

Janet's breast lifted in a half-sigh; it was true, but Janet would not have said it. She had learned from her own mother to hide her feelings, to present a smooth surface to the world; sometimes she hardly knew her own likes and dislikes, she had concealed them so long. Aaron was an honest snob; what was she? Aaron was saying, "Maybe Larry got into debt a little. I'm sure it's all right now."

When Mrs. Sherman asked about Larry's headaches, Aaron said what was so bad about an occasional headache. Janet flushed. Aaron had told her how Larry's migraines seemed to be tied up with Joe Sherman; maybe she should have told Mrs. Sherman. Janet hurried out to the porch just as the old lady, baffled and angry, said she'd have to be getting home.

The gardener brought a bushel basket of vegetables, the waitress carried out a great bunch of roses.

"There's some fruit in the back of the car already," said Janet. "I gave mother some of our cherry tomatoes, Aaron."

"We had trouble with those last year," said Aaron. "But they're doing well now."

Mrs. Sherman nodded briefly; her son Aaron bored her. Now the old lady raised her voice and called Judy and Babs back from their pine fastness. She slid one arm into the pongee duster Aaron held for her, and a flicker of pain made her press her right side.

"You feeling well, ma?" asked Aaron.

"Of course I'm feeling well," said the old lady, willing so hard for the pain to go away—she had no time for gall bladder attacks now—that she was able to move easily down the steps to her car. "Come on, you kids."

Babs and Judy curtseyed goodby, as directed, and climbed in beside granma.

"All right, Morton," said Mrs. Sherman, and they unwound past the rose garden, the formal garden, the pine woods, the rhododendrons, the gardener's cottage, through the gates and on to the road for home. Too late, Babs remembered that she had hoped to sit with Morton. She stole a look at granma, met granma's smile, and granma's arm went round her. "*Gott sei dank*, that's over!" said granma.

Morton, Judy, Babs and Mrs. Sherman laughed freely.

"What's so wonderful about coming from Cincinnati?" asked Judy.

"Even better than being a Sherman?" said Babs.

There was such a long silence that the little girls thought they had said something wrong. Just when they were ready to apologize for whatever, granma burst out:

"You listen to me, you kids," she said. "Your grandfather came here from Germany in 1849."

"Why, granma?" asked Babs.

"*Warum denn nicht?*" said Mrs. Sherman. "The Jews were treated like dogs in Germany. Babs, Judy, you listening? Your grandfather and his mother and father were poor immigrants. Their name was Scheuermann. Morton, you hear?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Morton, who had heard the story before.

"An immigration officer wrote the name wrong," said the old lady. "So the family's name is Sherman. Some *Dummkopf* couldn't write straight. They think they're so damn swell."

Morton and Babs and Judy laughed, knowing perfectly who granma meant.

"Scheuermann," said Babs, secretly liking Sherman a lot better.

"Yes," said granma. She told them about her own coming to America when she was eight years old, skipping from there to her life in Buffalo where she had worked in a bakeshop, and then to the years in Albany where her husband owned a dry goods store.

"There were twelve in help," said granma, "and I cooked lunch for all of them. Also all the children, however many I had at the time."

"Was everybody born in Albany?" asked Judy.

"What you mean, everybody?" said granma.

"Like mother, for instance," said Judy.

"And my mother?" said Babs.

"And Aunt Flora and Aunt Emma and Uncle Aaron and Uncle Si—" said Judy.

Up front, Morton was laughing softly.

"That's right," said granma. "They were all born there. Later on we moved to New York. After a while your grandpa bought out a brokerage house and a seat on the Exchange. Your Uncle Aaron and Uncle Si worked with him."

"And Uncle Joe," said Judy. "He must have worked with grandpa, too."

Granma sat straighter, seeming to leave a space between herself and the little girls.

"Yes," said granma stiffly. "Your Uncle Joe worked for his father, too."

After that she didn't say another single solitary word all the way home.

23

DURING DINNER that evening, Mrs. Sherman gave a lively if varied account of her day at the North Shore, combining scorn for what she considered Aaron's pretensions—forks for peaches! —with respect for Aaron's status—when had any of them tasted such crispness or freshness as in the lettuce, radishes, tomatoes, string beans, even peaches from Aaron's gardens and orchards? After dinner she stopped to smell the roses from Aaron's garden, stuck all anyhow in a green vase which came with the house.

"Where you'll find such fresh flowers?" she asked, and the family eyed each other behind her back and smiled. "I'm tired," said the old lady. "I'm going to bed."

Most of the others were going next door to call on the Ryans; Theo Green declined in favor of some new Western magazines. He went upstairs, and Larry followed slowly with his mother.

"Larry, you ate better tonight," said Mrs. Sherman. "You're getting your appetite back."

"Oh, I'm all right again, ma," said Larry, talking staccato because his breath was short after the climb up the stairs.

"So," said Mrs. Sherman. "Get a good night's sleep, darling."

Larry kissed his mother and went into his room. He unlocked the japanned box and took out manila folder, paintbrushes, tubes of paint, and a muffin tin for water. He picked up a small container filled with powdered white lead and unscrewed the

top. Then he sat back and listened for his headache, which was drumming very faintly beyond his right temple.

He swallowed a tablet, and went out of his room to the back stairs which spiraled steeply down to the pantry. The pantry was empty and so was the kitchen, but he heard the maids talking on the back porch. Gisela came in looking strange, a bird with ruffled feathers, these being her off-duty hours.

"Mr. Larry, you want something?" she asked, shaking herself into a proper smoothness.

"The white of an egg," said Larry. "Like last time." He slipped her a dollar which she took without any recognition of the transaction. "Thanks," said Larry, when she gave him the egg-white in a cup without a handle. It wasn't till he got up the stairs and was panting so hard he had to stop and lean against the wall, afraid Theo might hear him, that he remembered the black coffee he was supposed to take with each tablet. The hell with it! thought Larry, catching his breath; once won't hurt me.

In his room he spilled out some of the white lead powder on a saucer and mixed it carefully with a brushful of egg-white; he opened the manila folder and placed a Persian miniature on a clean piece of paper. The miniature was not his; this had been sent to him by a dealer for repair. Larry studied the picture under a strong magnifying glass, adjusting the gooseneck lamp on the table, the only light in the room, so that it shone full on the miniature. Here and there paint had flaked off, and the green paint had eaten into the rag paper, somewhat corroding it. The lines of the drawing were sensitive, everywhere of equal value and purity of intention. The figure of the warrior on horseback was set in bright sunshine, the fruit trees about him in flower; the spaces were filled with many charming objects which made up a pattern full of variety and repetition.

Larry dipped a brush in the white paint and began the delicate patchwork. The love, skill, use of the whole human being which went with this work released Larry into so forgetting himself that it was a kind of happiness.

The background noises of the night, for a while unnoticed,

focused in a hoot of laughter from the back porch. Larry shuddered in the warm room, reacting to, more than remembering, Joe's joke to Paul Haydon today, like others since his failure with the copper stocks. "Why don't you ask Larry," had been today's version of Joe's joke, "he's an expert on the Market." Larry had spent much of his time, lately, feeling like a fool, a child among grown-ups. Someday, thought Larry, following a worn path in his mind, when he inherited Sherman's, and was a man as rich as Joe was now, he would give Davie, who would then be the Crown Prince, all the time and understanding he needed to get into the swing of Wall Street; no—perhaps he would warn Davie off, and surely he would free him if that was what he wanted. There would be no ordering him into the office the moment he was out of college, as Joe had ordered Larry. But then, thought Larry, his thoughts clarifying uncomfortably, I didn't have to go, I could have refused, it's a free country. The family, even Claudie, even ma, Larry's girls, his friends, all believed in the common sense of Larry's past and future, and some of them envied him. I'm a freak, thought Larry, looking at the miniature glowing with the light kindled four hundred years ago; I don't even want a lot of money, not always, anyway. What were facts? Money, the world, and Joe? Or the world and the picture before him?

Larry wiped his hand on a clean rag and fell to work again. He was absorbed in his task when his breath began to come short as if he had been running upstairs; the miniature broke up and slid like a shower of confetti before his eyes. The colors darkened. He managed to set the wet paintbrush aside, to push his chair from the table, and then he fainted.

Larry's chair, screeching over the wood floor, woke Mrs. Sherman from a light sleep. She sat up, not knowing what had waked her, hearing no further sound. But she thought of Larry, and wondered if he would like something to eat; she would look in on him and bring him a glass of milk if he was awake. She hauled her purple wrapper about her and put on purple slippers.

Theo looked up from his story and smiled at her when she

went down the hall.

"Want something, ma?" he asked, but she shook her head.

She opened Larry's door softly, and found him crumpled over, his head on his knees, his breath fluttering.

"Theo!" she said, in a low voice that brought Theo at once. "Help me."

Theo lifted Larry to his bed and went to phone Dr. Liebmann. When he got back the old lady had taken off Larry's shoes and socks and was rubbing his cold feet.

"Liebmann'll be right over," said Theo. He attempted his cheery chuckle. "Don't worry, ma. He's been sitting in that strong light and he's had a dizzy spell."

The thick braids of Mrs. Sherman's hair touched her son's feet; her hands never stopped their gentle rubbing.

"Tell the others," she said. "At the Ryans'. They should come in quietly."

Theo went away, and the old lady met the doctor alone; her hands faltered, stopped. Dr. Liebmann asked her to wait outside, and he stood aside for her to go.

"Don't lie to me," she said. The doctor nodded, and shut the door to Larry's room. By the time he came out, the family was standing with Mrs. Sherman in the hall, all but Emma, who was in the kitchen making coffee.

"Hello, Claudie, Belle, Carl—" said Dr. Liebmann, social and offhand. "Nothing to be concerned about, Mrs. Sherman. I've given him a stimulant. Keep him quiet for a day or two. I'll look in tomorrow morning."

"It's his heart," said Mrs. Sherman. She had not asked a question, but everyone gave her answers, without mentioning black coffee: the heat, late hours he kept, not eating lately . . .

"You don't fool me," said their mother. "Dr. Liebmann, is he conscious?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "Mama, you come in here with me. The rest of you go on to bed. There's not a thing to worry about."

Still, the others hesitated; Liebmann had said mama, and he was not one of the many who called her that. Carl Nathan

thought painfully that Larry was a short sale, and he watched Claudie face the veiled threat to her brother's life with regained dignity. Her head was high, she spoke with a kind of gaiety:

"All right, everybody. Let's go down and drink coffee and eat up what's left of the *Schnecken.*"

In Larry's room, Dr. Liebmann took his pulse again, listened to his heart through a stethoscope, and, now that Larry's eyes were open once more on whatever the facts of his life might be, said, "Don't talk, son. Get some sleep."

Larry was too weary even to nod; he shut his eyes.

"Does he need a trained nurse?" whispered Mrs. Sherman.

"Lord, no!" said Dr. Liebmann. "Ma, you've got to get to bed, too. Let one of the girls sit with Larry. I don't want another patient on my hands."

Mrs. Sherman, beginning to press her hand to her right side where pain flickered, moved her hand up and thrust a braid of hair over her shoulder.

"Don't start with me," she said.

"Gall bladder acting up, isn't it, mama?" said Dr. Liebmann, and paid no attention to her furious "No!" "I'll take a look at you tomorrow, too."

Mrs. Sherman sat down in a creaking wicker armchair, a monumental figure, almost stony. The doctor shrugged his shoulders, came over and kissed her cheek, and said good night. When the door shut behind him the old lady seemed smaller, humbler, watching her son.

"Ma," he said, quite clearly, and he told her how to put away the litter on his table. She had not noticed any of this before, and to her it was like the toys he used to play with, the paints and brushes, the messy rags, the colored picture. She locked them away at his direction, set the key ring back on the bureau, and sat down again.

"Ma," said Larry, "I've got to get away."

"Yes, darling," said his mother.

"Ma, do you understand?"

"Yes, darling," said his mother, as gently and mindlessly as though she sang him a lullaby. His face, in the glow from the

gooseneck lamp which she had turned to the wall, was as white as the drying paint in the muffin tin; Mrs. Sherman was cold with fear, and a great wind blew about her. She had forgotten that wind, as she always did; but it seemed that with each death—she was old and had survived many deaths—a block loosened and fell from the walls about her life, and through each gap a great wind from eternity blew over her. She had survived, and in time the wind ceased to blow, or the gap closed up.

"Ma—"

Mrs. Sherman went to him and took his hand. She was desolate with knowledge; the indispensable stone was loosened.

"Yes, darling," said Mrs. Sherman.

"I've got to get out of the Street," said Larry. "I can't stand it there any more. I can't stand—"

He fell asleep. Mrs. Sherman stood beside him while his fingers relaxed and let go her hand. She was desolate with knowledge; if Larry died, she would survive even this, and the thought was more than she could bear. She moaned.

She did not care that Carl Nathan heard her, looking in at Larry's softly opened door.

"You've got to get some rest," whispered Carl. "Claudie'll sit up with Larry. She wants to." He put his arm around the old woman's shoulders and led her away. He waited till they were in her bedroom, with the door shut, before he spoke again. Then he told her the truth. "He's had a slight heart attack, ma," said Carl. "It's not going to kill him."

"Thank you, Carl," she said. "I'm going to take a pill now and go to sleep."

"That's the ticket," said Carl. He poured water from a thermos bottle and handed the glass to her.

"What's been happening with Larry?" asked Mrs. Sherman. "Do you know?"

"No, I don't," said Carl honestly.

"It's Joe," said Mrs. Sherman. Carl said nothing, since Joe was this respected lady's son. "Carl, Larry wants to leave Sherman's. What I'll do about it?"

"I wouldn't think about it now," said Carl. He helped the old lady into bed and watched her lie back. "Tomorrow he may not even remember what he said. Nobody throws away an opportunity like that."

Mrs. Sherman nodded at these words which all of them had said so often; but this time the meaning that held the words together was broken.

"Look in my jewelry box on the bureau, Carl," she said. "Under the cushion in it. There's a piece paper with Joe's phone number at home. You found it?"

"Yes, ma," said Carl, not showing his surprise; nobody was thought to know where Joe lived or where to reach him except in Wall Street.

"Give it to Claudie," said Mrs. Sherman. "She can wait till they're all asleep. I want her to call Joe and tell him about Larry, that he won't be in tomorrow, he's sick."

"Won't tomorrow do?" asked Carl. "You don't want to alarm him—"

"Tonight," said the old lady. "Late will be all right. She shouldn't tell any of the others about it."

"Yes, ma," said Carl.

Mrs. Sherman pulled Carl to her and kissed him good night. "*Ach, Gott, ich bin so müde.* Claudie should wake me if Larry—"

"He'll be all right, ma," said Carl. "Sleep well."

24

FLORA GLANCED briefly at the sliding green planes of mountains beyond the flower-edged balcony. The bellboy opened French windows, letting in pine-scented air and a faraway bouncy waltz played by the band in the park; he stood at attention before Flora.

"*Wünscht die Gnädige noch 'was anders?*" he asked.

"*Nein, danke,*" said Flora, for once in a way not paying any notice to a breathing entity which might respond to her. She took her gold-link change purse from her pocketbook, tipped the bellboy, and dropped the purse to its place beside the curling soiled envelopes which held last week's bad news from home.

"*Küss' die Hand,*" said the boy, taking the tip and leaving without a smile.

"*Küss' die Hand!*" said Flora, considering a variation. She had had an awful trip, long, and with no one to talk to; Max had seen her off, or she might have gone second-class for the sake of some sustaining company. Max was leaving for Berlin a day later to make arrangements for their wedding; he would meet her in Carlsbad at the end of the week. Flora had set off alone, first-class, in an empty compartment. She had read the *Paris-Herald,* and since she never, under any circumstances, read anything but newspapers, she had been defenseless, and had

slipped deeply inside herself. She had had to face the fact that she had sent only a postcard, a picture of the Eiffel Tower, in answer to the letters from home. She had written on the postcard that Paris was quiet and she hoped everybody was fine. A wave of guilt had rushed over her so that she could scarcely breathe, and its effects were still with her, intensified by the cable which had been handed to her here after she had registered. "Larry sick not serious Emma," read the cable, and what did that mean, taking into consideration the cost of cables?

Flora went to the telephone and asked if her brother, *Herr* Simon Sherman, was staying here at the Hotel Pupp. When the clerk said no, she asked him to call some other hotels, but she was not much surprised that Si was not at any hotel where a Sherman might conceivably be stopping.

"Damn!" said Flora.

"*Bitte?*" said the clerk.

Flora asked him in German to try a few more hotels. Of all things, she wanted to find Si, to cast the burden of the letters, of the cable, on him. She took a bath, looked gloomily at her yellow face, at her drooping body, so joylessly naked, sighed loudly, and dressed herself away from the cheval glass in a corner. Then the clerk phoned back; Si was at a hotel Flora had never heard of, but was not in at present. Flora thanked the clerk, and said she would go by the hotel and leave a note for her brother. She fled downstairs, through the lobby, seeing no one.

"That looks like Flora Sherman," said a lady in a rattan chair in the hotel garden.

"Nonsense. Never," said her husband.

"It did, though."

"I guess I know Flora."

The lady looked sharply at her husband.

Flora made her way through the town, beside the river. But Carlsbad, the pretty, sparkling town, with its tiers of houses built in terraces up the sides of the valley, was no more to her than the lowest point between mountains, a kind of representation of her spirit. Flora went on, clutching her pocketbook

with the heavy cable inside it, towards Si's hotel.

A little boy had been walking ahead of her, and now a second little boy rushed out of a side-street calling:

"*Wo ist der Onkel?*"

Flora picked up the scent, and hurried after the little boys. As she rounded a corner, she almost ran into a man who stood in her way. She tried doggedly to get past him, not looking at him.

"Well, Flora, don't you know me?" the man asked finally.

"Max!"

He kissed her hand, took her elbow, and slowed her to a stroll, while he explained that nothing in Berlin had seemed sufficiently absorbing to keep him from her. He waited for an expression of pleasure, but Flora only tried to pull him along with her. Max refused to be hurried. Arrangements for the wedding, he told her, could be completed by mail; a colleague of his here had got him a room at the Pupp.

"I called you when I got in," he said, "and they told me I'd find you somewhere here."

Flora did not answer.

"Are you feeling ill, my dear?" Max asked.

Flora struggled to come out of the cloud; she even felt yellow, and she knew how she must look to Max.

"I'm fine," she said. "I was on my way to find Simon. He's staying at some little hotel on this street."

Max's eyebrows were raised slightly.

"Ah, Simon's the eccentric Sherman," he said. "The bookkeeper who comes here every year for the cure."

"He comes here every year," said Flora, not losing sight of the little boys ahead of her, "but not exactly for the cure."

The little boys ran down a lane and joined a knot of children who were not making a sound.

"There he is," said Flora, her tone lightening.

Max leaned neatly on his cane and surveyed his future brother-in-law, a short, fat, rosy-cheeked man sitting on the curb in the midst of the children. His moustache was silver, the fringe of hair about his pink bald head was silver; on the top

of his head was a check-mark in black chalk. Si glanced up at Flora, said, "Hello, wait a minute," very calmly, and dealt a round of cards to the children who were all chattering now and calling him uncle. Si Sherman was dressed like a wine steward in a green felt apron; a silver chain with a large key on it hung about his neck. He and the children were playing blackjack.

Max took off his pince-nez and his far-sighted eyes got a good look at Si's cards; they added up to twenty-one. Then Si tossed his cards away face down, appeared to be resigned to his fate, and a little girl picked up a piece of black chalk.

"He lost on purpose," said Max to Flora, rather irritated.

The little girl made a check-mark on Si's pink pate, at which Si shuddered frightfully, and all the kids shrieked with joy.

"*Einen Augenblick, bitte,*" said Si ceremoniously to the children. He stood up, kissed Flora and shook hands with Max. "Glad to know you."

"Si," said Flora, "I want to talk to you—"

"Later," said Si. "I'm busy now."

Max suggested lunch, but Si said that he was always busy at lunch; he tended a linen shop for the proprietor while she ate. Max cleared his throat. Si said he'd have coffee with them at three, at Pupp's. Then he sat down on the curb and the kids closed round him.

"Si's a real nut," said Flora, her clutch on the pocketbook loosening.

"An original," said Max of his future brother-in-law.

A child ran after them and handed them a card from *der Onkel.* It had the name and address of a linen shop on it.

"That must be the one," said Flora. "Why don't we go there now, Max, and I can sneak in an order for some sheets and pillowcases with my new initials."

Max, Flora observed, seemed to cheer up. He also approved of the behavior of the plump, pretty woman who owned the shop.

"*Grüsst Gott,*" she said, standing to greet them. "*Was wünschen die Herrschaften?*"

All went well while they chose their linens, until Flora, feeling a little better, told the proprietor who she was.

"*Ach,* such a vounderful man, your brother!" She smiled, and her blue eyes softened. "The first time he comes in here—oh, some years ago—he was with his cousin, a *Herr Professor*—"

"You've got enough to contend with without that," said Flora to Max. "You may not meet him for years. He's at Madison, Wisconsin."

"*Ja,*" said the proprietor. "They come in just before lunch and look at everything around. Then they say they like my merchandise but it is too cheap." She and Flora laughed. "So they say they will go to eat and come back later to buy, and in the meantime to mark up the prices."

"That's a new one," said Flora.

"So *ein herrlicher Mann,* your brother! *Ausgezeichnet!* And they did come back after lunch, and bought and bought."

Flora put her foot out under the counter and trod gently on the proprietor's toe.

"Of course you hadn't raised the prices," she said.

"Of course not!" agreed the proprietor. "And now Mr. Sherman comes every summer here and is my good friend."

"Oh, Max!" said Flora, when they had left the shop. "I told you Si was a nut."

This time Max did not substitute *original* or any other euphemism.

"He must be a rich man," said Max. "If he can indulge himself like that."

"Si hasn't a dime," said Flora. "He's never had any ambition. Maybe he makes enough to come here every summer, or else he gets it out of Joe somehow."

"In short, he is thoroughly irresponsible. I must say I feel rather sorry for your brother Joe."

"Don't," said Flora, momentarily talking to herself. "That's what Joe likes. What he can't stand is if any of us manages to get away."

"My dear Flora, what nonsense is that?"

"Oh, you know me," said Flora instantly, setting herself to

pleasing Max. "Half the time I don't know what I'm talking about. That's why I'm so lucky to get a brilliant man like you."

Max told her once more, but half-heartedly this time, that she was talking nonsense. He did not refer again to Simon, although he was prepared for anything except the elegant elderly gentleman who showed up in an Oxford gray worsted suit with a line of immaculately white piping about the vest. Still, Max took no chances, and said that the brother and sister must have things to talk over, and he'd go to his room and rest.

Si ordered coffee with *Schlagobers* and inquired if Flora and Max were planning to be married. Flora did not answer.

"Listen, Si," she said, "I got all this bad news from home, and today I found a cable from Emma." She took the letters and cable from her pocketbook and set them on the table but Si did not seem to see them. "Maybe you heard, too."

"No," said Si, "they've given me up as a bad job. Except Emma. What'd they say?"

Flora went ahead and told him about the family crises, especially about Larry's being sick. He listened with his distant, quizzical air.

"Did Emma say what's wrong with Larry? No? All of a sudden she's so economical," said Si.

"Si, should I go home?"

"What would you do when you got there?"

"Well, I'd *be* there. I could—"

"You could worry with them," said Si. "Emma figures everybody ought to be as worried as she is, otherwise it doesn't count."

Flora told him she handled Joe better than any of the others, at least she could help Larry that way. Si nodded, looking fresh and detached. Then suddenly he bent toward her and spoke seriously.

"I don't know what's wrong with Larry, except that it's mixed up with his being at Sherman's. He shouldn't be there; he can't take it."

"Then that's why I ought to go home," said Flora. "I could manage Joe."

"One, you couldn't manage him. Two, even if you could it wouldn't help Larry; some things he'll have to do for himself."

Flora listened and nodded; Si resumed his quizzical air.

"Of course if you want to go home and suffer," he said, "don't let me stop you." Flora said nothing, and began to smile. "They've all got their own problems," said Si. "Did they say how ma is?"

"Minnie says ma is raising hell," said Flora.

Si nodded, and his pink jowls shook over his starched wing collar.

"In other words, ma's fine," he said. "I'll be going now, Flora."

"Will you meet Max and myself for dinner tomorrow?" asked Flora.

"No, thanks," said Si. He laughed without a sound. "I'm not marrying him; I suppose you are. Well, I'll see you before you leave. You going back to Paris later?"

"We're going to be married in Berlin," said Flora. "Now don't write that home."

"Me?" said Si.

"I have to tell Joe in my own way, so he thinks it was his idea," said Flora.

This time Si laughed out loud, and Flora joined him, as carefree as she had ever been in her life.

"What will that make it?" asked Si. "Ten months you've been a widow?"

"Almost," said Flora.

"Don't you know it's a shooting offense to remarry in under a year?"

"I can get away with it," said Flora.

"All right," said Si. "You can. *Auf wiedersehen.*"

Flora, alone, was so relieved that she tore the battered letters and the cable into fragments; she'd cable her love later. Now she looked up at the façade of the hotel, the balconies wreathed with flowers, the windows shaded with striped awnings. Max was in one of the rooms; she'd get the number and just surprise him. So she set off at a lively pace

through the garden, smiling at anyone who looked up. One gentleman rose from his rattan chair and bowed to her.

"I told you that was Flora Sherman," said his wife.

"*Now* she looks like herself," said the gentleman, and his wife glanced sharply at him.

25

FOUR DAYS after Larry's heart attack, a Sunday, the household was returning to normal. The unearthly hush that had prevailed was thinning, though Belle still darted from her room to hiss "Sh!" at any heedless dash up the stairs or any voice raised in careless (cheerful) sound; a stranger might have thought she loved her brother better than all the rest, she was so vigilant. From door to window she went this morning, between intervals of brushing her hair.

"Quiet!" she whispered through the rusty window-screen to Babs and Judy looking for dandelion clocks to tell the time by, but they did not hear. Belle peered through the tiny squares down to the tennis court where Susan was playing doubles with the two older Ryan boys and Carl Nathan. You'd expect at least Carl would have some consideration, thought Belle, and she straightened up queenly at the wealth of consideration she alone possessed for her stricken brother.

A racket twanged, silence fell, and Susan's voice cried out, "Love all!"

Belle heard and shuddered in her soul, as though someone walked over her grave. She leaned to the mirror and counted one, two, three gray hairs.

Larry heard Susan and smiled. He was lying on his freshly made bed, in an enchantment of pleasure, idleness without

guilt, on doctor's orders. He was still weak, and not unwilling to be weak; a secret knowledge sustained him, that his divorce from Wall Street would be absolute. He did not remember that he had spoken of it to his mother, the night he fainted, and preferred to keep his decision to himself while he recovered. Larry shut his eyes and fell half-asleep, though he knew when his mother tiptoed in and drew a light blanket over him.

"Ma."

"Nap a little yet," said Mrs. Sherman. "In an hour you'll have dinner. Roast squab."

"Now I know I'm better," said Larry. Roast squab, following the first light diet of chicken broth and rice, was always a sign that convalescence was proceeding nicely. "Ma—"

"What, darling?"

"You got a mob coming out for Sunday dinner?" asked Larry. He opened his eyes to look at his mother.

"I don't know yet who all's coming," said Mrs. Sherman. "You don't worry; nobody's going to disturb you. You can depend on it. Now rest."

Mother and son communicated with perfect understanding; they had no need to mention Joe.

"Later on, when I'm stronger—" said Larry.

"That's right," said Mrs. Sherman.

Reassured, Larry fell asleep, and Mrs. Sherman went away to find Claudie. The Nathans' room was empty, the Greens' room was empty, Belle jumped when her mother opened the door.

"Larry's sleeping," whispered the old lady. "Be careful not to make a noise."

"Oh, ma! As if I—"

But the old lady had gone. She went downstairs and looked into the rooms there; Claudie was nowhere. Then Mrs. Sherman walked out through the children's dining room; Claudie sat reading the newspaper on the screened porch.

"Claudie, I want to talk to you."

"Well, I'm here, ma."

"We'll take a little walk back to the barn," said Mrs. Sherman.

Claudie went with her mother under the trees on the back lawn.

"What is it, ma?" she asked. "Larry's all right, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Sherman. "But it's better he doesn't see Joe just yet. Try to reach Joe, Claudie. Tell him we can't have so much company yet awhile. No, tell him I'm not feeling so well."

"Then he'll surely come out," said Claudie. "Ma, you don't want me to call him at home again?"

"You know he'll be at the office now, if you can reach him at all."

"All right, ma." Claudie did not want to hear again the sweet voice, sleep-laden but courteous and concerned, which had answered when she phoned Joe late the night of Larry's attack. She could not think, now, about "that woman Joe lives with"; she must not intrude further on this lady's privacy. But she went at once to call Sherman's; the phone rang and rang, and no one answered. She went out again to tell her mother. "If he does show up," said Claudie, "we can tell him Larry can't see visitors yet."

Mrs. Sherman nodded, but she was not easy about the day. She walked through the house, into the kitchen to relieve her feelings where she safely could, examining the contents of icebox, oven, and each pot on the stove. But even Gisela knew Mrs. Sherman's need, and made no impatient move. The old lady was not one to brood.

Belle, in her room, listened to the Sunday noises, the squeak of the turning ice-cream freezer, whinny and stamp of Carrots airing at the stable door, the porch rockers creaking, Davie gurgling in his play-pen, Beanie growling at a wild smell, the little girls blowing passionately at dandelion clocks, and, most of all, Susan's fresh young voice crying out the score to Carl and the loving Ryan boys. These sounds so worried Belle that it was almost as if they threatened her repose, rather than her brother's. She picked up her hairbrush, put it down again,

leaned to her image in the looking-glass. Her white and always idle hands clutched the sides of the mirror; it tilted, and a sheet of blind light refused an answer to her wordless question—*who's the fairest of them all?* "Love!" cried young Susan from the tennis court, and Belle was so frightened, feeling only half-alive, that she went straightway from her room. She trailed the mourning ruffles of her wrapper down the stairs, her brown hair fell weeping about her face. She looked out to the porch, into the parlors; the coast was clear.

She sat down at the telephone and called Alec's number. His voice was thick with sleep, but Belle had no thought to apologize for waking him. She was set on one matter only—to rid herself of the awful fear that held her.

"Larry will be allowed up today," she answered Alec's questions, and shrugged aside his, "Good! You must be relieved, dear."

"If you ask me," whispered Belle, "he's a very sick man." And what she meant, without knowing she meant it, was that she, Larry's sister, was very sick with mortality, and knew it would finish her off in the end. "Alec—"

"Can you get into town tomorrow?" asked Alec.

"Oh, yes!" said Belle.

"Tea at my flat at four-thirty," said Alec. "Is that settled?"

"Yes," said Belle.

"Darling, I believe you. Now listen, I'm coming out on an afternoon train to pay my respects. I won't talk to you about this. Goodby, my dear."

Belle hung up, and sat on a minute at the phone; she was beginning to tingle faintly with life again. Mrs. Sherman looked in and told her to stop *schlamp*ing around the house in a wrapper and get some clothes on.

"All right, mama," said Belle. She went obediently to the stairs, and was halfway up when the doorbell rang. Mrs. Sherman turned to Belle.

"Who's that?" she asked.

"Ma, how should I know?"

The waitress came into the hall and walked toward the door,

but Mrs. Sherman was ahead of her. She let in a tall strange man who held out his hand to ma and Belle heard him say that he was Paul Haydon, and that he hoped he had not come at an inconvenient time to inquire for Larry. Belle, curious to see Joe's friend, wrapped her kimono tight about her as if that would make her invisible, and descended two steps. Paul Haydon was carrying a bunch of red roses for Mrs. Sherman, but when he looked up and saw Belle his hand veered a little as though his offering were for her.

Belle fled away out of sight, but then she lingered. Ma was saying she didn't think Larry could see visitors just yet, and Belle didn't listen any more; she knocked on Larry's door and told him that that Mr. Haydon was downstairs, and ma sounded as if she weren't going to let him see Larry.

"Hey, I want to see him!" said Larry.

"Then you'd better tell ma," said Belle. She opened his door wide, and when Larry called to his mother, and ma answered, Belle went to her room and shut herself away, all pins and needles with returning life. This time her mirror did not fail her, and she began to do up her hair, not even bothering to hide the three gray hairs. Susan pranced on the porch below, and called goodby-for-now to the Ryans. Belle was disturbed neither for herself nor for Larry. She took her new Bendel dress from the closet and drew it on carefully. Once more she faced her pretty image, and pinched her cheeks and bit her lips to give them more color; then she swept down to the porch where her festive appearance was noticed and misinterpreted by most of those present.

"Is Alec coming out for dinner, or after?" Emma asked her, speaking for the majority.

"I really haven't the remotest idea," said Belle.

There was a pause.

"Ma's having another place set. That Mr. Haydon must be staying," said Minnie, speaking as minority voice and town crier.

Belle picked up the rotogravure section of the paper, holding it lightly so as not to soil her fingers.

26

MRS. SHERMAN sat somewhat apart, near the front steps of the porch, having announced after dinner that she didn't want to lie down. She rocked a little, her hands flat on the arms of her chair; the old lady, thought Paul Haydon, looked as if she were on guard. Paul was in no hurry to go up to see Larry; he waited to be asked, and smoked his cigar in all good grace, waiting, too, for Belle Hoffman to reappear. Would she reappear? She had excused herself after dinner and followed her sisters out of the dining room.

The dinner had been delicious, Paul thought, dwelling with unaccustomed fervor on the subject of food; everything had had a somewhat foreign flavor, and the interest and enthusiasm of the diners had made him feel as though he were in Europe, in Bohemia, perhaps. Now the company on the porch talked idly, as required by the fact that all of them had eaten too much and too well. Paul welcomed this repose; he was a calm man, by ordinary, but his visit to the Shermans had been almost too stimulating. Even now he felt that energy sizzled between positive and negative poles, with, at times, himself as center. His most startling moment so far had been the genial shout when the ice cream appeared.

"Are you staying out here, Mr. Haydon?" asked Carl Nathan.

"I'm at the Ocean Hunt Club for the week end," said Paul.

There was an instant of silence, barely noticeable, so quickly did Carl Nathan change the subject. What was wrong with the Hunt Club, Paul wondered, but he took up the new subject easily.

The little girls had looked up from a sated rereading of the funnies, and were watching him.

"Do they ever really hunt there, Mr. Haydon?" asked Judy, the older of the two.

"Oh, they did a while back," said Paul. "It's all polo, now."

The other little girl turned red. What was wrong with her? What was wrong with everyone, suddenly?

"I'll take you both to see a match, one Saturday afternoon," said Paul. "Would you like that?"

"Oh, yes!" said Judy.

"No, thank you," said the other little girl.

"That will do, Babs," said Carl Nathan. "That's no way." He didn't seem displeased, though. He went on, as if to explain something to Paul. "Matter of fact, the kids have seen a couple of games. They watch from along the fence."

"The Ocean Hunt Club," said Mrs. Sherman, almost out of sight behind the back of her rocker. "They drink a Jew's blood for breakfast there."

Paul was so startled he almost laughed, and then he did laugh, because all the others were laughing. Once again the subject was changed in a friendly way; the negative currents had been discharged. The little girls, who seemed disposed to continue a conversation that was ended, were told to go away and play somewhere quiet. They retreated into the circle of ripening hydrangeas and could be heard now and then in piercing whispers. Mrs. Sherman asked about afternoon trains from New York, and having been told that there would not be one for another hour, seemed satisfied to go upstairs and see how Larry was getting on.

"I'll call you if he's up, Mr. Haydon," she said. "You'll do him good."

"Thank you, Mrs. Sherman," said Paul. These people had good manners, he thought, unaware of any snobbishness on his

part; they were leaving him to his own devices now that his visit had lengthened. Carl Nathan asked him if he'd care to take a stroll, and when he said no, he'd just sit on and enjoy the afternoon, they excused themselves or wandered off.

So he was alone when Belle returned; he rose, she sat down on the wicker settee, and they made conversation. Neither listened much, being both engaged in lively interior wanderings, but it became clear that on the surface, at least, they were much alike. They did not believe in suffrage for women, though Belle disapproved the idea more strongly than did Paul; she would be a Republican if she had the choice, and, of course, Paul was a Republican. As for the country, well, Paul preferred the mountains, and Belle the seashore.

"I really shouldn't talk though," said this remarkably pretty and charming sister of—of all people!—Joe Sherman. "I've never really given the mountains a fair chance."

Hadn't he heard or read somewhere that Belle Hoffman was getting a divorce? Paul told her about his favorite resort in the White Mountains, and saw that Belle's color rose, that her face looked solemn. Paul did not know why, and now he became almost aware of the degree of intimacy he had reached far away inside him with this chance-met lady, and he stirred, smiled, obliterated the fancies.

Before them the light fell golden, the warm air was honey-sweet; a few leaves fluttered to the green lawn. Paul gave over thought for the peace of these minutes, while Belle, inside herself and adept at not knowing what went on there, was of two minds about marrying a gentile, and she also felt that the brownstone house Mr. Haydon was supposed to own in the East Sixties would be a great nuisance for her to run.

They began to talk about the opera; Paul said he'd be happy to take Belle and her mother, if they'd honor him, sometime. Belle smiled and said she did not know about mama, but she'd accept for herself with pleasure. How utterly right, how *comme il faut*, was the first meeting of these two!

The little girls came out of the ring of hydrangeas and crunched over the gravel driveway to the porch. They examined

lord and lady as though they themselves were invisible, and turned away to the world beyond the porch.

"Look, Judy," cried Babs, "a double darning-needle!"

Paul looked, too, saw a flicker of blue flame, the dragonflies in airy copulation, and smiled at Belle. But that lady, in a fine passion of respectability and happiness, pretended not to understand, and managed to look almost as innocent as the little girls.

Then Mrs. Sherman called down that Larry wanted to see Mr. Haydon now.

MRS. SHERMAN met Paul Haydon at the head of the stairs, and he followed her down the hall. He looked into the bedrooms as he went, with a frank curiosity he would not have shown with his own friends; these people lived more in the open than any others he remembered. One bedroom had stacks of books everywhere, it seemed, more books than he might see in other bedrooms, and in the next more curly pulp magazines. Inside the next Paul saw a neat bureau-top, covered with an embroidered runner, on which were an ivory-backed toilet set, two photos in embossed silver frames, three bottles of perfume, a drift of pale-blue malines over all; the mirror reflected a brass bedstead with a violet-flowered chintz upon it. He saw this entire, in passing, and guessed that this was Belle Hoffman's room; the glimpse made him cheerful if tense.

"He shouldn't excite himself," whispered Mrs. Sherman, before she knocked at Larry's door. Paul nodded.

Larry came out and shook hands, and thanked Paul for his visit. Paul waited for Mrs. Sherman to precede him, but she pushed his shoulder gently.

"Go on, go on," she said. "So. All right, darling. I'll be just in my room if you want something. I'll shut the door now, and that way you won't be disturbed."

"Thanks, ma," said Larry. "Take the armchair, won't you, Mr. Haydon?"

Paul sat down facing a Maxfield Parrish reproduction, very blue, which hung on a wall papered with strings of mauve morning-glories. Larry smiled.

"The pictures come with the house," he said. "I don't even see it."

"That's just as well, Larry," said Paul. "How are you feeling now?"

"I'm fine," said Larry. "I've had a good rest."

There was an instant's courteous pause, in which Paul was conscious of the Sunday afternoon silence like an oil-slick over the household. Then he saw Larry's eager look, and remembered their conversation at Sherman's.

"Would it tire you to show me your miniatures?" he asked.

"Not a bit," said Larry. He unlocked the japanned box which had clearly not come with the house, and took out a magnifying glass and some manila folders. "The light's better over here, if you don't mind moving." He looked so healthy and strong that Paul allowed him to pick up the armchair and set it down near the window.

"Look, here, Larry," he said; he was paying a sick-call, and had forgotten it, "you sit down and take it easy."

"I'm honestly O.K., Mr. Haydon," said Larry. He sat down, stood up again, and leaned over Paul's shoulder. Paul, looking at a jeweled battle scene, tried not to be distracted by Larry's attentive silence. Larry sat down again, leaving him free to study the pictures, except that sometimes Larry had to point out a broken line on one—"I got stuck that time"—the perfect condition of another. Each time Larry spoke, Paul saw something fresh, but he did feel that Larry was a bit overheated about his pictures; Paul thought, with no hurt to his self-esteem, that he appreciated the arts within reason.

"You know a lot, Mr. Haydon," Larry said once, and then apologized for the surprise in his voice. "I wish you could see a miniature I'm hoping to buy—" Larry laughed. "Some chance!"

Larry looked less well now, and Paul felt a quick sympathy for him.

"Why not go into the business?" Paul asked. "Become a dealer."

Larry flipped the corner of a folder back and forth.

"I have thought of it, sometimes," he said. His eyes were bright; Haydon remembered Mrs. Sherman's telling him not to let Larry excite himself. He bent over another picture. Tiny Persians rode across a polo field, mallets at the ready; aristocrats on horseback watched from the sidelines. There were no little girls.

"I'm tiring you out, Mr. Haydon," said Larry.

"Not a bit of it," said Paul, as tired as if he had spent the last hour walking through a museum.

"I'll just show you one more thing," said Larry. "I couldn't resist it." He pulled out a drawer of his chiffonier, lifted out a pile of shirts, a ring of collars, picked up the lining at the bottom of the drawer and from under it drew a large sheet of ivory-colored paper. "A Togluk. Belonged to a Turkish sultan, sixteenth century." Larry held the royal signature before Paul; it was like a celestial harp, azure-colored, outlined in gold, the spaces within filled with delicate blue flowers dotted with red and gold.

"Interesting," said Paul, very tired but not showing it. Behind him, around him, the Sunday afternoon began to spin with sound, a record starting slowly, off-key, on the gramophone. He roused himself, and politeness, like a second wind, carried him along; he said enough about the Togluk to please Larry, and then asked him about the miniature he hoped to buy.

"It's one of a group showing artisans at their different trades," said Larry. "They're very rare. It's not cheap—the dealer knows he's got a good thing. He's keeping it for me—well, I know that's nonsense, but still—"

An animal instinct made Paul look up; behind Larry the door had swung open; Joe Sherman stood watching them from black-rimmed eyes, a ghost smelling of whisky, smoking a Corona-Corona cigar.

Larry turned.

"Joe!" said Larry, so white that Paul rose as if to catch him.

"Let's have a look," said Joe, holding out his unoccupied left hand for the seal of Sulaimon.

Slowly Larry held out the seal; Joe took it, glanced at it and tossed it to the bed. The Corona-Corona, with its long rich crust of ash, was held over the golden harp.

"What did you give for this?" asked Joe. Larry did not answer, and Joe did not seem to expect an answer. Haydon stepped forward, but Joe did not speak to him. "Larry, they told me you couldn't have visitors yet. Feeling better?"

"I'm all right," said Larry very slowly, and Haydon saw that he was trying to control his short sharp breathing.

Joe nodded, looked through Haydon again. "So I see. Well, don't rush yourself getting back to the office. We'll try to get along the best we can without you." Joe Sherman's shoulders shook as though he were laughing, but his expression did not change. Once more the cigar, with its inch-long ash, waved in the air over the harp, and Larry took a quick step towards Joe, but now the door swung shut.

"Sit down, son," said Paul, as outraged by Joe's rudeness to him as by his brutality to his brother. Larry murmured thanks and took the armchair, clasping, almost wringing, his hands before him; he looked, thought Paul, unused to the fury he felt, as if he were freezing to death.

Mrs. Sherman came in fast and told Larry to lay down on the bed and not try to talk now.

"I dozed off," she said. "Darling, I never heard him."

"That's all right, ma," said Larry. He spoke to Paul. "I'm sorry, Mr. Haydon. It's awful to get in on these family things."

"What Joe said to you?" asked Mrs. Sherman. "Mr. Haydon, what he said to Larry?"

Paul shook his head; he did not know what to answer, and was knotted with resentment at the generous impulse which had involved him with these strangers. The angry, inadmissible thought rose up—these strangers were Jews. Now Larry, too, appealed to him.

"How long was Joe standing there, Mr. Haydon?" asked Larry.

Larry and his mother waited for an answer, but Paul could only say he didn't know. Mrs. Sherman turned away to count medicine drops into a glass of water, and Larry shut his eyes. For both these people, Paul was no longer present. He got past them with a whispered excuse neither of them would hear. Paul wanted one thing only—to get away from here. The hall downstairs was empty, and he went to the stand for his hat and cane.

"Drink?" said Joe Sherman, from a parlor full of faded cretonne roses and faded wallpaper roses.

Paul seized this opportunity to discharge his anger.

"Thank you, yes," he said. "I'll have it neat."

He went into the dining room with Joe, where Moses, holding the tablets of the Law, leaned against the clock; it was only half-past three. Joe held out a glass, and refilled his own.

"No reason for you to get sore, Haydon," he said. "You forget Larry is my responsibility."

Paul drank. Joe was calm, and even seemed to be amused.

"You like the pictures?" he asked.

"Some of them are very fine. He's to be congratulated."

"If you've been encouraging Larry in his nut ideas," said Joe, "stop it."

Paul began to feel better.

"You've been telling me Larry doesn't know what he's doing downtown. He might very well make a go of it as a dealer."

Joe's face reddened.

"Were you planning to back him?" he said. He waited through a contemptuous pause. "Larry is my concern. Leave him alone."

One of the sisters, the small homely one, darted into the parlor; Paul saw her through the open double-doors pretending to put together the spilled Sunday papers.

"Lawrence is of age," said Paul. He set down his glass, and turned to go. "He might be able to find backing."

"I said don't encourage him! It won't do him any good."

"I will do exactly as I please," said Paul over his shoulder, too angry to keep quiet. Joe left the dining room, passing so close to Paul that he had to step back to get out of his way. Instantly the small homely sister darted to him, looked up at Paul and said solemnly as though she pronounced a curse:

"Joe will never forgive you for that. Never." She moved then, as if coming out of a trance, and said, smiling, "I'm dippy! Why should you care, Mr. Haydon? You're not a Sherman."

Paul thanked God silently that he was not. He bowed, found his hat and cane, and went out to the porch where three more sisters sat in a frieze, sewing. They, too, were solemn, and must, Paul realized, have heard most of what had been said. He watched them, unseen for a moment, while they moved like the Fates at their handiwork. From one to another passed the small, gold-and-silver stork-shaped shears, and the thread was cut, the shears passed back. Paul stepped out on the porch, and the sisters rose to see him go, turning back into pretty Belle Hoffman and two others.

"Poor Mr. Haydon!" said one of them, not Belle. "He's been treated like one of the family today."

Paul made a sound meant to be polite, but it did not strike him as successful; there were so many things better never said, and these people seemed to say all of them. He looked to Belle, less alien to him, perhaps, because she was prettier than the others, but she had started down the steps to meet a taxi now rounding the hydrangeas. Paul said his goodbys, wanting only to be alone and maybe give a great, furious yawn.

"I'll take that cab," he said to Belle; a too good-looking man was getting out of the taxi. Belle introduced him to the man; Paul did not catch his name or ask to hear it again. He waited for the driver to be paid, and Mrs. Sherman called through the screen door:

"Belle, you didn't say Alec was coming."

"How should I know Alec was coming, ma?" said Belle.

Mrs. Sherman came out and Paul said goodby to her. The

old lady ignored his outstretched hand to give him a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

"You're a good man," said the old lady. "Thank you. Next time we see to it you enjoy yourself."

Paul drove away, trying to remember if he had actually called Mrs. Sherman ma when he left, or only thought it, and why on earth he should have wanted to when nothing about the old woman reminded him of his own mother. He was smiling.

28

MINNIE HAD a terrible time getting to the phone the following morning. The day was overcast, gray, and the damp salt air had got inside the house and put a thin layer of glue on everything. On a day like this, when no one went to the beach or far from the house, the telephone was worked overtime. Ma had Emma call in her order to the grocer, Claudie shut the door to the children's dining room practically in Minnie's face and whispered so all you could hear was the ring-off when Claudie hung up. Susan got a call from one of the Ryans—Minnie thought she heard her say Chris, but couldn't be sure—and then Larry came downstairs, gave Minnie a cold look and announced he had a call to make to a gallery in New York. He asked right out, as if he wanted her to hear him, if the picture he was interested in was still there, held for him till he made up his mind, and what was the dealer's best price on it. "Good," said Larry finally, "you'll let me know." He went out to the barn to take a look at Carrots, and when Minnie thought she could make her call to Joe, the bell rang.

"I give up!" said Minnie out loud. She was making for the phone when Belle swept past her, picked up the receiver, and cooed, "Hello?"

Belle listened. "Oh, Janet," she said. "How are you? Just a minute." She, too, closed the door in Minnie's face. Minnie,

offended, started upstairs and met Emma on her way down.

"The traffic's certainly terrible today," said Emma. "Who's got the phone now?"

Minnie said virtuously that she really hadn't the faintest idea. She was annoyed by everyone's suspicions of her, and retired to her room leaving the door open only a crack.

Emma peeked into the children's dining room, and Belle made a sign to her to enter and shut the door behind her.

"It's Janet," she whispered. "Janet, do me a favor and tell Emma."

"Oh, dear," said Janet, but, in her hesitant voice she repeated to Emma the message intended for Mrs. Sherman. "I think your mother ought to know," said Janet. "I should have told her when she came to lunch, but Aaron told me to stay out of it."

"Out of what?" asked Emma.

Janet's voice strengthened. "Larry's been having trouble with Joe. He hates Wall Street, or else it's that Joe never lets up on him. Larry bought a little stock on margin and got sold out, and now Joe treats him like a fool."

"I won't listen to you," said Emma, putting the phone at a distance from her mouth, but listening still to the sister-in-law who wasn't a Sherman. Janet went right on.

"I've been so worried," she said. "Maybe it's foolish to think if ma had known in time Larry might not have gotten sick."

"Absurd!" said Emma.

"If Flora were home—" said Janet. "She seems able to handle Joe. But now ma will have to know, to protect Larry."

"That's a terrible thing to say," said Emma. "Joe's devoted to the family."

"Oh, Emma, you know what Joe's like," said Janet.

Emma's face flushed. "That's enough!" she said.

"Tell your mother," said Janet, and then, as if to herself, "If only Ma answered the phone sometimes! Emma, promise me you'll tell her."

"All right, all right, I'll tell her," said Emma. The minute

she had said goodby she turned to Belle. "As if I'd tell ma any such thing! 'You know what Joe's like.' Having to listen to that from a stranger!"

Belle looked her sister straight in the eye, and then looked away.

"I'm out of this," she said. "Do whatever you think's best. I can't afford to get Joe down on me."

She left Emma there, in the children's dining room. Emma put the phone down slowly, considering what was the right thing to do. She reached a compromise: she would not trouble ma with Janet's hysterical fears, but she would send Flora a night letter saying that she was needed at home and to get here by the first steamer. She'd just walk down to the village to send the wire, she thought, when she came out and saw Minnie looking down over the banister.

"Janet," said Emma. "She called to inquire for Larry."

"That was very attentive of her," said Minnie. She saw Emma put on a shade hat, pick up her pocketbook and gloves, and go outside. Then her mother left, announcing to anyone in earshot that she was going to the poultry man's to find a small broiler for Larry's lunch. Claudie was in her room, writing, so she had said, for catalogues from the colleges—such nonsense, always studying; what did it get her, Minnie would like to know—and Belle had returned to her room and shut the door as usual. Minnie crept downstairs.

She didn't quite know what to tell Joe, now that the coast was finally clear. Belle's note in the morning mail had probably come from Alec, since Belle had turned pink and covered it with ads she would otherwise have torn up. What was the meaning of Janet's call just now? Minnie couldn't figure that out, and maybe she wouldn't mention it. She sneaked to the phone, got her number, and whispered a request to speak to Mr. Joseph Sherman. While she waited, she heard Larry and the little girls talking on the screened porch outside. She hunched herself around the phone, and drummed her fingers silently on the table.

"Well?" said Joe, with that abruptness which was so alarm-

ing even when you expected to hear his voice.

Minnie pulled herself together and spoke in what she considered her most diplomatic manner.

"Joe, Larry's allowed to take Carrots out for a drive today, if the weather clears up. The doctor was here early."

"The doctor say anything about his coming back to work?"

Minnie paused, and worked her fingers.

"Well?"

"Dr. Liebmann said next Monday. But I got the impression—Larry spoke to some gallery about a picture today." Minnie gave a little laugh, like a cough. "I must be crazy, but I got the impression Larry may not be going back to Sherman's." The silence at the other end of the wire frightened her. "Just I happened to overhear him telling Claudie he was never going back—"

"Never?"

"That's what he said. Claudie was encouraging him, too. You know how she's always sided with him—"

Joe hung up. That's the thanks you get! thought Minnie, but she was not put out by Joe's behavior; he wasn't angry at her. She moved quietly out of the room, and let her heels tap as she walked to the screened porch. Judy and Babs were playing parcheesi with Larry.

"Having fun?" she asked. She looked out at the gray light, the heavy air in which no leaf stirred. "Gloomy!" she said. "But I'm always an optimist. I think the sun'll come out."

"I'm beating them all hollow," said Judy.

"Judy, that's not the right attitude, darling," said Minnie, selfless an instant as she spoke to her daughter who would be a beauty someday, and someday, too, would have everything else that Minnie had not. Minnie was seeing to that. But part of the game was to hide the facts. "Larry," said Minnie, "can I get you something? A glass of orange juice?"

Larry shook the dice in the cup and said, "No, thanks," over the rattle. Minnie, full of good works, went upstairs to see if Claudie wanted something she could get her. Minnie's flat face shone with a humble desire to please, and that was all there

was to show the hate that knotted her bowels: Claudie and Larry, the two bright ones, always sticking together no matter what. Claudie said impatiently she didn't want anything but a little quiet to finish her notes to Columbia and the Union Theological Seminary. All that studying, thought Minnie trotting along to Belle's room, it was just a weakness and where did it get Claudie? She and Larry thought they were so independent. One of these days they'd find out just how independent they were; she'd done the right thing by speaking to Joe.

Belle didn't want any services from Minnie either. Emma was out, but Emma never left anything lying around, and anyway it wasn't safe. Minnie returned to her small bedroom which reminded her day and night of her own dependence. She moved everything on the bureau, straightening up what was already straight, buffed her nails, snipped off a hangnail so angrily she almost drew blood, and went through a pile of Theo's Western magazines, throwing half of them into the wastebasket. She didn't know what to do with herself now, so she sat for a few minutes, looking at the latticed wallpaper without seeing it. She might have been half-asleep, sitting there, but when the maid came upstairs to call Belle to the phone she was ready. The minute Belle started down, Minnie tiptoed into Belle's room and began to search for Alec's letter if it was Alec's letter.

She heard steps on the stairs, and got into the hall just in time. Emma gave her an icy look.

"I was going to the W.C.," said Minnie, "to weep a tear."

"Minnie," said Emma, "if I ever catch you in my room you'll regret it."

Minnie looked humble and offended at once, and escaped into the toilet.

29

"JUDY, LET'S not finish this game," said Babs. "You're so far ahead it's no sense."

"We have to finish," said Judy, determined to make her win final. "You might still be able to send me home."

"Oh, all right," said Babs. She stood up and pulled her gingham skirt away from the chair-seat. "Gee, everything sticks today." She turned and picked up Judy's puzzle, ball bearings rolling free, from the arm of the chair. "Uncle Larry, do you think we could ever get this puzzle? You taking Carrots out this afternoon, Uncle Larry?"

Before he could answer, the three on the porch heard Belle at the phone. "Hello," she said, voice formal but musical. "Oh, hello," and now music predominated. "How are you, Mr. Haydon?"

Larry winked at the little girls.

"This afternoon? Well, yes, I think I— Yes," said Belle.

Judy held the cup tilted over the parcheesi board, but did not throw the dice. "That Mr. Haydon," she said, almost without making a sound, "I knew he was falling in love with Aunt Belle. Didn't I tell you so last Sunday, Babs?"

"Yes," whispered Babs. "Will she marry him, do you think, Uncle Larry?"

Belle said, "At four, then. Goodby." They heard her leave

the room, and she came to the door of the porch and smiled at the three of them if by any chance she saw them. Then she went away.

"I guess she'll marry him," said Babs. "Don't you think, Uncle Larry?"

"Well," said Larry, "she's still married to someone else, and she has to get a divorce. Paul Haydon is a gentile, and Belle doesn't approve of mixed marriages."

"Anyway," said Babs. "Or maybe she'll marry that Alexander Levy. What do you think, Uncle Larry?"

Larry burst out laughing. "Hawkshaw the Detective!" he said.

"Babs, she can't marry Mr. Levy," said Judy, with the wisdom learned at her mother's knee. "He's too poor."

"Kids, you scare me," said Larry.

The little girls gave him a leisurely look. They smiled at him as if he were their age exactly, and Judy rattled the dice and threw two sixes.

At lunch, Belle got in a word now and then, always a question about someone's plans for the afternoon. Mrs. Sherman, giving most of her attention to Larry, was the last to notice. She put down her fork.

"All right, now!" she said. "What you're doing this afternoon, Belle?"

"Me?" asked Belle.

"I'm waiting," said the old lady.

"Oh, for heaven's sakes!" said Belle. "A person can't have any privacy around here. I think it's disgusting."

"What you need privacy for?" said Mrs. Sherman. "Belle, answer me my question."

"All *right!*" said Belle.

Mrs. Sherman looked straight at her.

"You don't talk to your mother like that," she said.

"I'm sorry, ma," said Belle. "I'm going to have tea with Paul Haydon. Is that anything terrible?"

The old lady thought it over, while the others around the table watched both of them.

"I won't stand for any more scandal," said Mrs. Sherman.

"Ma, he only asked me to have tea at the Hunt Club with his cousin and her husband."

Emma's head shook.

"If Seth Hoffman ever gets hold of it he'll use it against you," she said. "You're making a mistake, Belle. Everybody'll see you."

"You think it's better if she meets him on the sly?" said the old lady, settling Emma. "That Haydon is a very decent man. You go ahead, Belle." Mrs. Sherman pushed back her chair. "I'm going to lay down. Larry, you should take a rest, too."

There was a pause while Larry and his mother left the dining room.

"Belle, you must have made a conquest," said Minnie. "Ma seems to think he's a catch."

"Really!" said Belle. "I've met the man once and you've practically got me married off to him."

Emma folded her napkin into rigid lines. "I don't see how you can go to the Ocean Hunt Club," she said. "Where we're not wanted. I know I wouldn't. Mr. Haydon may be decent and all that, but in the last analysis they all hate us."

Belle, already alarmed by the prospect of tea at the Ocean Hunt Club, and humiliatingly pleased as well, could think of no answer for Emma who sat shaking her head like a witch making spells. Then the phone rang— "Not again!" said Minnie—and Belle jumped up.

"I'll get it," she said. "The girls are eating."

The caller was Alec, wanting to confirm their engagement to meet at his flat; had Belle forgotten? Of course she had not, Belle told him, polite but seemingly under the impression she was talking to a stranger. But he had asked in his note that she call him this morning, was anything wrong, and Belle said coolly nothing was wrong, the phone had been busy every minute, that was all; she could do no better than that, and,

listening to Alec beg her to tell him what might be wrong, she looked more blooming with every word, as though she fed on Alec's distress. At last she said firmly, "I won't forget. Goodby, Alec." "You'll be there?" "Of course." "Darling—" "Goodby," said Belle.

It was what she had needed; the safety of numbers attended her later when she came out to meet Paul Haydon. He had a note for Larry, and was asking the maid to give it to him.

"We're a bit early," he said, shaking her hand. "I thought we might take a little spin first. Would you like that?"

Belle said that would be very nice. She climbed into the limousine and looked straight ahead while the chauffeur drove round the hydrangeas away from the faces of Babs and Judy which she could only hope were hidden by the window screen. Belle had worried, putting up her hair three times before she got it right, wondering what they would talk about, but it turned out to be easy. Paul Haydon never mentioned Joe, just asked for ma and Larry, and spoke of her sisters, whose names he could not recall—

"We're a big family," said Belle, saying family in the special way the Shermans had. Then she came off it, laughed, and said that ma had advised all of them not to have as many children as she did. A bright, attentive silence at her side made her say, "I haven't any children, myself."

"You should have had a daughter as pretty as you are," said Paul, and Belle sighed as though for her barren state; she had quite forgotten that she had been so anxious to have no children that at one time she had eaten crushed eggshells because a manicurist told her it would prevent conception.

"Though it's a good thing now, I guess, that I haven't any children," said Belle. So she referred obliquely to her divorce, and felt her cheeks glow with shame, remembering Seth's public charges; she should have stayed home in her room, what would anyone think of her? But Paul Haydon spoke about her husband's bad behavior, which could hurt only himself, and asked where she stood in her suit for divorce. Belle didn't know; her lawyer was away on vacation, and sometimes she

thought she would never be free. Paul told her he had some friends on the bench, would she mind if he tried what he could do to facilitate the proceedings, and Oh, please do! said Belle.

Paul adjusted the windows so that the damp air would not blow too hard or at all on Belle. Belle was soothed and at ease, not troubling whether they talked or not. She looked out at the familiar large houses, most of whose tenants she knew; in this village and around it, well-to-do German Jews divided the upper regions of the air and land with well-to-do Irish Catholics. This was Belle's country, her summer world; but now she was going beyond it, as the car drove along, into Paul Haydon's world. The houses were no different, and the hedges only seemed higher to Belle, the lawns neater, the driveways shaded by catalpa trees more seclusive. Dampness, a horrid mixture of warm and cool, closed about Belle; she shivered. Paul spread the lap robe over Belle's knees.

"It's a poor day," he said. "Though I think we may still get some sun. We'll go to the club."

He spoke to the chauffeur, and the car was turned around toward the dangerous Hunt Club. They were on a dirt road, driving under tall old elms; they came to the polo field, and Belle saw the accursed fence beyond which the gods played polo and the goddesses looked on. Emma had been right; you should never go where you're not wanted. Suddenly Belle wanted to pee, and this seemed as lowdown a thing as could have happened to her, nor could she imagine how she would make her need known or find her way alone to a ladies' room inside the dangerous club.

"I think you'll like my cousins," said Paul. "Hugh is between assignments—he's in the diplomatic service."

"Oh," murmured Belle.

"His wife's a saint," said Paul.

They were in sight of the clubhouse now, where some very superior or anyway gentile gods and goddesses ascended the steps. When they reached the club, Paul got out and handed Belle from the car.

"You might want to freshen up," he said. "The ladies' washroom is on the right as you go in."

"How did you guess?" said Belle, with a natural laugh.

The rest was easy. Paul's cousins were in their late fifties, he was handsome in a bland, cool way, and his wife might have been good-looking but she was wearing a taupe Georgette crepe that bunched at the waist—Dutchy, thought Belle—and a Panama hat that needed reblocking. Her string of pearls was worth a fortune, and gave an effect of deliberate dowdiness on her part. She and Paul led the way to a table outdoors, under an awning, and Belle sailed in with Paul's cousin. The cousin, after they were seated, asked Belle if she lived around here, and Belle said yes, but when the cousin discovered she didn't know old Freddie X., Pinkie Q., Sherry Y., or even Tinko Z., he looked lost, and then his wife, the saint, mentioned a stray Rothschild they knew in London, maybe Belle knew him too. Belle felt fine.

"The only Rothschild I know," said Belle, "is a tailor at Hickson's. He made me a lemon suit once, and I had it made over but it was never right."

Paul smiled, the male cousin sat up straight, stared, burst out laughing. His wife gave a saintly, bewildered smile. The tea party, Belle told her mother later, had been a great success.

30

At dinner that evening all the people round the table seemed as chance-met, as separate and self-contained, as the ball bearings at loose in Judy's puzzle. The talk, never sustained, had the courtesy of strangers met on a train. Even later, when they sat a while on the porch in the sheltering dark, only Carl spoke out; he had had a letter about his physical examination from the insurance company, not turning him down, but asking him to come in again for another check-up because his blood pressure had been up a little the last time. Everything aggravated Carl tonight, and Theo had lit his cigar for the fourth time, Larry was smoking his third cigarette. Carl moved upwind.

"God damn it," he said, "it smells like McGurk's-on-the-Bowery out here."

"Theo," said Minnie, "you're annoying Carl."

Theo chuckled.

"He should be glad he's got us to take it out on," he said.

Mrs. Sherman turned her head, trying to see Carl in the thin light from the windows. When the others rose to go upstairs to bed, she took his arm and kept him by her.

"You heard from Joe?" she asked, when they were alone.

"Joe?" Carl didn't know what she was talking about.

"The loan," said the old lady. "The loan you wanted."

"Oh, that," said Carl. "Don't you worry yourself about that."

Mrs. Sherman took her hand from his arm.

"You didn't hear," she said.

"Plenty of time yet," said Carl.

The old lady said nothing. She went inside, upstairs, and found Larry, still dressed, lying on his bed; he was reading the financial section of the morning's *New York Times,* which had been read earlier by so many people that the print on the crumpled page looked faded. Mrs. Sherman took note of his reading, his drooping body as he plodded through the sand of the quotations, and said nothing about either. But Larry answered her as if she had spoken.

"No matter what I decide to do, ma, I'll have to know what's going on."

His mother seemed not to have heard, except for the stillness of her body. Then she moved, leaned over and kissed him.

"Get to bed, darling. The drive was too much for you this afternoon."

"No, it wasn't, ma," said Larry.

His mother went away; Larry heard her in the hall asking Minnie fiercely if Joe had called Larry today.

"I'm sure not, ma," said Minnie. "I ought to know, I was in all day."

"Then what's wrong with him?" said his mother, and stamped back to her room without waiting for an answer.

Larry slid off the bed and began to undress. What was wrong with him? He had had a good day, his first real day in the world since his illness. Everything that happened had been good, which made his present sadness hard to understand. Paul Haydon had sent up a note of introduction to a friend, a man whose name Larry knew as an art collector. "He may be interested in acquiring one or two of your miniatures," Haydon wrote in his covering letter to Larry. "I've also written to an acquaintance in Chicago who is connected with the Art Institute—a trustee, I believe—about your pictures. Let me know how you are getting on." How very kind of Haydon, Larry had thought, hating his suspicion that Haydon's kindness was a way of getting back at Joe. Larry had sent a letter at once to

Haydon's friend, and to Haydon himself, thanking him. Larry wrote easily, with great charm; he had even, this afternoon, charmed himself up to the surface of life, and looking up from his table he saw that the sun had charred and burnt a hole through the gray mist of the day.

He had run downstairs and back to the barn; he told Morton that the sun would stay out now, not to try telling him anything different, and to harness Carrots. Horse and cart had been polished to a high gloss; Larry climbed into the Mineola cart and took the reins, which creaked with soap and polish, into his hand. The elegant turn-out, young man, horse, cart, drew a wave from the German nurse wheeling a baby carriage toward the Sherman barn, applause from several Ryan boys standing on their porch rail, and a smile from Rose Stein as she passed him in her electric. He had been a Larry long absent, a man he liked and admired, sure of what he was about, sure of his taste and acumen, the youngest son of the old queen, setting out in the world to make his fortune.

Carrots' hoofs rang on the asphalt, his tail tossed, his glossy rump moved like silk in the sunlight; the horse slowed, dropped russet, rich-smelling balls of dung, paused, went forward without breaking the pace, left front leg and right rear leg, right front leg and left rear leg, all of him off the ground between times, in a dancing motion. Time was when Larry had worried secretly about training Carrots to so restricted a gait, but not today. Today he shared that rhythm. The hot sun, smouldering, dried the countryside till it sparkled with salt traces left everywhere, and the colors of trees, flowers, lawns, were sharpened, brilliant.

Ah, but then—Larry had forgotten, and remembered now—the ringing hoofbeats became thuds; sand had blown over the dirt road to the beach, and the wastes on either side were dry and yellow, dry and gray. Tough struggling weeds grew in patches, thick-stemmed, storing what rain water came to them against the parched times; long grasses were thin, creaking, dry and persistent. The smell of salt was strong in the air, and the dank, rank smell of rot and decay and damp.

The sea came in sight, raging, great waves piling up, breaking with a rush, toppling over, and whitecaps foamed up the black sand. There was black-green in the hollow of the waves, and a sudden chill in the gray air moved over Larry like a tide. He drove on, past the grandly named Pavilion where the poor came with their children and lunch in shoe-boxes, past the bath-houses where the Shermans bathed, to the long old wooden hotel, seen sideways from the Mineola cart, the endless porch at the front, and the back, all garbage cans and stink, the backside of the world.

Another Larry drove home, looking not so very different from the one who had ridden out, though he might have sat an inch shorter in his seat; Carrots, with the reins slack in his master's hand, broke pace, ambling along the dirt road, jogging near the home barn.

Morton caught the reins as Larry let them drop, and held out his hand to Larry when he alighted. He gave Larry a sharp look, said nothing to him, and spoke to Carrots instead.

"You let Mr. Larry overdo his first day out, you, Carrots?" said Morton. "You ain't got good sense."

Larry shook his head and smiled. "We had a fine drive, Morton." So they had, for most of the afternoon, but now these pleasures had passed from his mind like a dream, and he was sad. He dropped Haydon's notes to the bureau-top, and instead of getting into bed he sat down at his table and in the light of the gooseneck lamp he took up a pencil and began to figure prices on his miniatures. While he did so he wondered why he should think he might sell any of the pictures, and as he persisted he mocked his optimism. And then, figuring possible profits—not more than three hundred and fifty dollars at the outside if he sold them all—he seemed to have come to the heart of his distress. If he got back his original investment, say, and three-fifty more, he would have made a start and could go on buying, more wisely than when he began. Why? Why just now should he feel so ill that he must reach out for his drops? At that moment, though, he knew: he was threatened with

independence. The knowledge so shamed and alarmed him that he forgot it at once, by main force. Instead of taking medicine, he looked through his miniatures.

He focused the light full on each one, examined the detail of flower and foliage, animal and bird, but the pictures were dead. For the first time they looked unlighted, a freak taste by a freak Sherman. Worst of all, the dead pictures before him deadened Larry till he seemed almost safe again, being without feeling. He did not even trouble to lock the box into which he thrust the miniatures. He got into bed and fell into heavy sleep, escaping his bad dreams.

Belle had locked her door, more as a ritual to ensure privacy than because anyone was likely to break in on her. Her preparations for the night were a sort of white magic; she brushed her hair fifty times, set combs into the waves, tied all in blue malines, frowned, smiled at her image, saw herself as Paul Haydon might see her, as, oh dear, Alec might see her, untied the malines, took out the combs, brushed her hair again and lay down in bed as crisp and proper as a china doll with eyes that opened and shut. Only the mechanism that controlled her thoughts was on the loose, and she considered Paul and Alec in a way she could not approve. Still, she was happy, strengthened by her afternoon among the gentiles with Paul Haydon so attentive. How unfortunate, though, that she should still want to sleep with Alec; sleep with! Belle smiled, drowsy, off-guard—what a funny way to say it. Inside the bisque figure lying motionless on its back ran a wave, raging. Belle sat up. She got out of bed, took Alec's letter from under the handkerchiefs in her bureau-drawer, and tore it into tiny bits. She dropped the bits into the wastebasket and returned to bed. The tearing of the letter was strong magic. Tomorrow she would tell Alec she could not possibly meet him at his flat ever. I must have been crazy, thought Belle, relaxed, wide-awake. She shut her eyes again, blushed for near-sinning, drifted a way into that area of female practicality which calls for a

knowledge of how to count to twenty-eight, or nine, and considered Paul Haydon's money, the happy accident of his being a widower.

But I want Alec, thought Belle, at once sitting bolt upright in bed. Damn! She'd never get to sleep. She turned on the light, reached for her book of which she had read thirty-five pages in two months. She picked up the book as if it might go off in her hand, found her place, read a page, and fell asleep with bedside lamp shining into her face.

31

AT QUARTER-PAST four Claudie unlocked the door of her New York apartment. She had come in on a mid-morning train, gone to the dentist to have her teeth cleaned, to Madame Behrwald to see if she could make her new corset more comfortable—"It kills me when I sit down," she had said, as angry as if a great deception had been visited upon her—and met Kate Wilkins for lunch at Maillard's. Since Claudie and Kate Wilkins had never seen each other, Claudie, on making the engagement, described the peach basket hat with wreathed poppies and cornflowers, the navy-blue crepe de Chine dress with lingerie collar she would be wearing. But Miss—was it Miss? —Wilkins, rising at once to greet her, had told Claudie she would have known her anyway. "There's a family resemblance," she had said.

Now Claudie took off her hat and looked at herself in the hall mirror. She frowned at her image, and turned and waded through air thick with the smell of mothballs into the twilight of the shut-up living room. Sunshine rippled, where green shade and white shade had warped. The victrola, which Claudie had had lacquered black with small gold Chinese figures, was back from the decorator; Claudie, hat in one hand, roll of wallpaper samples in the other, considered the victrola; it was as big a beast as ever. It looked almost alive in the

corner, with sunlight quivering over it, and all the other furniture covered with ghost-colored slips of Holland linen.

"I give up!" said Claudie aloud, about the victrola, the warped blinds, the August heat, Kate Wilkins, life, what-have-you. She went in back to her bedroom, dropped the rolled wallpaper on Carl's bed, and lay down on the chaise longue; tar paper crackled under the linen slip cover. She shut her eyes and waited. How did she feel?

She felt nothing. Claudie sighed again, experimentally. But Larry's illness, shocking her from her accustomed round, had destroyed her time schedule, if anything so eccentric could be called a schedule. Larry's illness had made it possible for her to meet Kate Wilkins, too. The first thing Kate Wilkins said, when they had ordered lunch and were facing each other, was that she did hope Larry was much better. After that it had been easier to talk. Claudie turned impatiently on the sofa, and the tar paper crackled like the flames rising about Brunhilde's rock. The twin beds of married life, in their pale covers, with pillows piled under a sheet, looked unfit for any human purpose, but memory stirred in Claudie far beneath many coverings. Kate Wilkins, she thought, getting at marriage obliquely; after lunch, when they were out on the scorching street, she had asked Kate to come along with her to select wallpapers, and Kate Wilkins gracefully refused. Did this pretty woman with graying hair select her wallpaper alone or in company? Still looking at the marital beds, bleached as though in a dream, Claudie yawned and dozed off.

The elevator man was too busy giving his observations on the weather to tell Carl that Claudie had arrived. Carl let himself in and went into the parlor, taking a tentative breath of the stuffy air. He rolled up the shades, opened the windows, let down the awnings outside. Then he turned to the victrola, which looked a little peculiar to him, opened the double-doors, and chose an album. Holding the album carefully, he sat down in an armchair by the windows; the chair-seat rattled as he sat down. God damn it to hell, thought Carl, moving so that

linen slid over tar paper beneath him, women are all crazy.

He was not tired, though he should have been. Last night Claudie had been quiet, and gone to sleep with such frightening ease that Carl had lain awake watching her, finally getting up to lean over her, and later to consult the barometer of her moods, the tube of triple bromides; he was trying to see if she had taken too much of the medicine, as she had so often and recently threatened to do. This morning, overcoming his shame at letting anyone into his private life, he telephoned Dr. Friedlander and asked what was really wrong with Claudie, what were the chances— Back had come that voice from a cloud, there was nothing essentially wrong with Claudie, though her worst swings did suggest manic depression to the layman, it was just that her moods either way were more pronounced than in most people. But would she ever kill herself? Probably not, came the report from Olympus, not that one could ever say positively about anyone, let alone Claudie. "Still, I spoke to her recently," said Friedlander, "about Larry. She never even mentioned herself, and that's hopeful. She called me." "Thank you," said Carl, a tiny bit reassured; he had never met Friedlander, but he didn't sound like as big a jackass as he had supposed from Claudie's talk about him.

Then, in his office, he found no word from Joe Sherman, as usual since he had gone to him about the loan; a letter from the life insurance company told him he had been given the extra insurance after his second physical, adding that his blood pressure had been within the limit of high normal this time and more relaxation was in order. A couple of hours thereafter Carl made himself a present of some relaxation by dropping in on Hayes and giving him the increase in salary he had asked for. "That suit you?" he asked, and Hayes said, "Thank you, yes, I never wanted to leave anyway, Mr. Nathan." "Right," said Carl, "and don't tell me who made you the offer. I don't want to know."

He returned to his own office and told Miss O'Donnell that he was a man of few words and he hoped she would forgive him if he called his best friend, Henry Blum, a son-of-a-bitch.

Miss O'Donnell forgave him.

At half-past three he left, telling Miss O'Donnell he was making good his getaway before anything else hit him. At that, he was in a good humor.

On the way uptown he stopped in at Putnam's and bought Claudie a copy of *Marie-Claire*. The lunar month was coming to an end; once a month Carl bought her a French novel for her day in bed, and Claudie, who never read novels, read that because it was in French which took the curse off it.

Now Carl chose a record from the heavy album. He pushed up the top of the victrola, fastened in a new needle, wound the crank at the side. The record began to spin, and Carl let the needle down gently. He sat down again on the crackling chair and listened.

"*Salut, demeure, chaste et pure,*" sang the golden voice, and Carl carried out the prescription of his insurance company: he relaxed.

Claudie woke to Caruso's voice, and waited till the song was almost finished before she struggled to her feet. Should she tell Carl about her lunch with Kate Wilkins? Of course not; she would never tell anyone. She came into the parlor, her cheeks flushed and round with sleep, her hair flattened and pushed to one side. Carl let the needle run over the last groove and scratch round and round while he kissed her. It was their end-of-day greeting, and a touch more than that.

"Oh, Carl!"

Carl let her go, and went to turn off the record.

"Carl, how do you like the victrola?"

"What about it?"

"Don't you notice anything? I had it lacquered," said Claudie.

"So that's it," said Carl. "I thought it looked a little different. Just so it sounds the same. Have you got the samples?" He was choosing another record, and Claudie went to the bedroom and brought the lengths of wallpaper she had picked up earlier.

"I thought one of these for the dining room," she said, un-

rolling silver grass-cloth, pale silver grass-cloth, straw-colored grass-cloth. "What do you think?"

"These the lastest shriek?" asked Carl.

"Oh, Carl, if you're going to ridicule everything—"

Both of them listened to the note in her voice, and were undecided what it meant.

"The pale silver," said Carl. "If it suits you."

The pale silver suited her, and besides, Claudie added crossly, it was his home, too, wasn't it; she just wanted to please him.

"That so?" said Carl, without considering what these simple if bitter words might bring on him.

"Oh, shut up," said Claudie, instead of bursting into tears.

Carl was so heartened that he put on *Vesti la Giubba* before following Claudie into the library. The smell of camphor was overpowering here, since all the rugs were rolled into long, tar paper packages in front of the bookcases. The bookcases, like the furniture, were covered with Holland linen; each cover was tied down the center with tape bows. Under this were the glass doors of the bookcases, and behind these the books were wrapped in oblong newspaper parcels.

"God forbid anyone should want to get his hands on a book, once it gets warm," said Carl.

"You want a clean house, don't you?" said Claudie.

Carl smiled, and Claudie almost smiled. The library, if anywhere, was the place for agreement between them; they could not live without books, and walked around with books in their hands as if they were part of their organisms. Already Babs, visiting friends, had come home to them and remarked with surprise when there had been no library, sometimes not even one row of books.

The record ended; Carl went away and put on *Che Gelida Manina.* When he came back he found Claudie spreading lengths of wallpaper on the library table. He helped her choose one, knowing that Claudie couldn't make up her own mind.

"This ought to lighten the room," he said.

"It's a nice room, though," said Claudie.

"Why not?" said Carl. It occurred to him, so fleetingly he caught only the warmth but not the words of the thought, that their marriage might have been happy, but where did it say you were to get happiness?

"We better make a start," said Claudie. She went to the bedroom for her hat and gloves, and turned to find Carl right behind her. "You're crazy," she said, sidestepping him.

"What of it?" said Carl. "We can take a later train."

A dying fall sounded from the parlor.

"The victrola's running down," said Claudie. "I'd like to hear you if Barbara did that."

In the time it took Carl to walk to the parlor and turn off the victrola, Claudie pinned on her hat, caught up her gloves and pocketbook, and stood waiting for him at the front door. Carl moved deliberately, pulling up the awnings, closing the windows, drawing down the blinds. They waited for the elevator in the small hot entrance hall.

Carl gave Claudie a quizzical look; she had assumed the correct, I-am-never-anything-but-vertical appearance of the gentlewoman about to sally forth.

"You could always have had your skirt re-pressed," said Carl, following her into the elevator.

"Looks to be another scorcher tomorrow," said the elevator man. "Or maybe a storm to clear the air."

So the trip back to earth finished, and in the Madison Avenue street car they sat side by side not speaking for a few blocks, in a silence marital but friendly.

"Did you make the two o'clock in?" asked Carl, more because he felt at ease than for information.

"I came in this morning," said Claudie. "Carl."

"What?" asked Carl. He turned his head to look at Claudie, and saw that her full lips were pouting and childish. "What is it, Claudie?"

Claudie smiled at him, like a child again.

"I had lunch with my sister-in-law, Carl."

"Janet? What did she have to say?"

"Not Janet," said Claudie. "Kate Wilkins. Carl, you mustn't ever give me away."

"Since I don't even know what you're talking about— Who is Kate Wilkins?" But then he knew. "Not that woman Joe lives with? Really, Claudie—"

"Carl, please listen. She's a lovely person."

"I can just imagine," said Carl. "I'd expect Babs to have better sense."

"Carl, please—" Claudie still looked like a child, but an honest child. "She sounded nice on the phone, Carl, and I admit I was curious. So I just thought, after all, what harm can it do? You'd like her, Carl."

"What has that got to do with it?" said Carl. "Claudie, if you knew more about the world you'd realize that this type of woman—"

"What type of woman, Carl?" said Claudie stubbornly.

"A kept woman," said Carl.

"Carl—" Claudie was silent so long that Carl put his hand on her arm as a peace-offering. "Kate thinks ma wouldn't want Joe to marry a Christian. She doesn't even know Joe's rich. She does all the housework."

"What is she, a young woman?" asked Carl, wondering if Claudie had been taken in.

"I think she's maybe a year or two older than Joe. They've been together for years." Claudie's hazel eyes peered at Carl and looked away. "I was ashamed," she whispered.

Carl took Claudie's hand in his.

"Just because your brother Joe behaves like a stinker is no reason for you to feel badly," said Carl, thinking to comfort Claudie.

Claudie pulled her hand away.

"I should have known what your reaction would be. I don't want to discuss it any more," she said coldly, as if Carl had started the whole thing.

Carl, jolted, began to feel sorry for himself; he had cheered up too soon.

THEY MET Belle on the train and sat with her; Carl rode backward, facing Belle and Claudie. Claudie interrupted an edited version of Belle's afternoon in town.

"We're birds, we are!" she said. "Si's boat docked today."

"Oh, I bet everybody forgot," said Belle.

"That's a hell of a note," said Carl. "No one to meet him."

"Maybe ma remembered," said Claudie, but Carl reminded her that last summer, too, all of them, including the old lady, had overlooked Si's arrival.

"Si won't care, anyway. He's never had any family feeling," said Belle, looking radiant and cheerful in the dove-gray dress and large hat heaped with dove-gray roses. *Alec*, thought Carl and Claudie, but they were wrong. This had been Belle's day for the fatal tea, and she had dressed for it from the skin out; all the way in to New York she pondered the secret, unspoken knowledge between Alec and herself, which made it impossible for them to give each other up, would ruin her chances of finding a good husband this time, and might last and last and last. She had felt so miserable and trapped that as soon as she got to town she broke her appointment with Alec, saying, unconcerned, when he told her this finished it, that that was all right with her, she must have been crazy to consider such a thing in the first place. Then, free, as it seemed, she phoned Paul Haydon and took tea with him instead. Serene

but bored, she let him pour her tea in the parlor of his English-basement house, and he had to ask her twice if she took milk or lemon. Finished, nothing!, Belle had been thinking then, I can change my mind and sleep with Alec any time I want to. She wanted to, had, indeed, never stopped wanting to, and what was she doing sitting here with this tall gentile stick? Color came into her cheeks; her arms, legs, fingers, toes, felt as tense as if strung with tightly coiled springs. Belle smiled at her host and told him his house was so much like her mother's that she felt at home right away, they even had similar grandfather's clocks in the big downstairs entrances, ticking majestically, with sun and moon stuck permanently above each face. When Paul asked her if she would like to see more of the house she said that she'd love to (his conversation was so formal and dull, any move might help her forget that she could have been with Alec now). They went up the stairs, into the front bedroom which had been Paul's wife's, and through the two alcoves with two washbasins to the back bedroom which was Paul's.

"I always think that's such a mistake," Belle said, not thinking at all.

"What's a mistake?" asked the unconsidered gentile stick.

"Husbands and wives should share the same bedroom," said Belle. "Oh, I'm sorry!"

"But you're right, Belle," said Paul, laughing a loud, astonished laugh. He was close beside her, though she had not noticed this before, and he put his arms about her and kissed her. Belle's response to him was so ardent he might have been Alec, and there, thank God, went fatal passion.

He let her go, and did not touch her again, but Belle had had one glimpse of a lively, enthusiastic, hard-bitten man, before he slipped from sight under the frost. They went downstairs, where the parlor-maid waited with fresh cinnamon toast, and this time Belle poured the tea. Paul's talk returned to houses, his and ma's, if anything more impersonal than before, and Belle hung on every word. Why, thought Belle now, giving gently to the motion of the train, I'd just as soon sleep

with Paul as with Alec; if anyone had told me such a thing a half hour ago I wouldn't have believed it possible.

The conductor came by and Carl handed over their tickets, while Claudie watched him with her formal, or consort, expression. So she looked when she sailed down beside him to their seats at the opera, or sat, good as gold, with her long white kid gloves elegantly rolled back and under at the wrist, using the cloisonné opera glasses he had bought her in Paris, earnestly and intelligently listening. But Claudie, thought Carl, would never know the thrill down the back that told you this was the real thing.

The sound of the train crossing the trestle was splintered and hollow, and the water of the inlet was solid as metal under the golden tides of the setting sun. Carl looked out, and then, eyes dazzled, turned back to the dusty gloom inside the coach, where he made out the image of Belle looking happy and confused. Carl smiled; confusion was chronic with Belle, together with a conviction that she saw all clearly and must share her vision. I bet she'd give me the lowdown on the market, thought Carl, if I played my cards right. He read the closing prices; Standard Oil was steady, up a fraction of a point since his visit to Joe Sherman. Carl shook the newspaper till it crackled, folded it neatly, and fell into a reverie so deep it was as if he dreamed. When Claudie touched his knee and told him to come out of his trance, they were getting in, he could not have told where he had been or what decisions he had made there.

They took a taxi from the depot, and before they turned in at the driveway they saw the whole house lighted up.

"What gives?" asked Carl.

Belle and Claudie said they had no idea, and then Claudie exclaimed:

"Oh, Si's home! We forgot again."

The screen door banged, and the children stamped out on to the porch shouting mother, father, Aunt Belle, Uncle Carl, Aunt Claudie!

"Gently, gently!" said Carl, and the children showed their

presents, a doll for Babs, a silver locket on a silver chain for Judy, a Teddy bear for Davie. Susan flashed out, displayed a blue enameled watch hanging from a blue enameled bowknot, and ran next door to show the Ryans.

Carl stayed in the hall, looking into the parlor where a basket-trunk was open in the center of the room. Mrs. Sherman sat on a love seat with the space beside her piled with white damask tablecloths, napkins, towels. The glass-topped wicker table tilted sideways under the weight of linen sheets and pillowcases. Minnie stood at one side of the trunk, Emma at the other, Larry perched on the edge of a deep armchair, Miss Wilson and Lena, Davie's nurse, stood against a wall, in front of the faded pink, scrambled roses wallpaper. Simon Sherman, his round pink face and bald head shining, was laying a lace-edged centerpiece over Emma's outstretched arms. He nodded to the returning commuters.

"Claudie, Belle," he said.

The Shermans, thought Carl, were not much on displays of affection. But now Simon came into the hall to shake hands with him. "Carl, glad to see you," he said. He gave each of them in turn a straight, quizzical look, and returned to the trunk, taking out more centerpieces, lace doilies, runners, which he set on top of the sheets. "Ma, you pick out what you want, and the girls can divide up the rest," he said. "The sheets are monogrammed for you, and some of the other stuff, I guess."

Mrs. Sherman said all right, and opened a big napkin and shook it out under the lights, where it glistened, as solid as fine. "Very nice," she said. "You bought too much."

Si smiled and shrugged his shoulders. Carl spoke to Theo, who had come downstairs and was standing next to him: "Si must have bought out Europe. Too bad no one met him."

"I got to the dock," said Theo the good-hearted. He chuckled, and sucked at a back tooth. "You never saw such a thing in your life. Si declared everything. I'll bet he was the only one off the steamer that did it. And the prices were so high the Customs man got sore. He kept telling Si they'd certainly taken him in Carlsbad."

"What was Si's answer?"

"The damn fool just laughed and said he'd asked for it." Carl shook his head.

"So help me, bob," he said, "I'll never understand the Shermans if I live to be a thousand." Still, just now, living to be a thousand seemed a probability, and not a bad one, at that.

Si called them in to receive some Charvet ties, after which he picked up an armload of presents and went out to the kitchen. When he returned he gave Miss Wilson a challis shawl printed with round red Bohemian roses, and Lena a rosary of red Bohemian glass beads with a wooden crucifix, and the inexhaustible trunk still had a layer of gifts in it "in case I forgot anyone, and for the office," said Si. "Ma, how about it?"

"Morton," said his mother.

Si moved his head sideways and his jowls shook in a way that suggested laughter.

"Morton got his neckties," he said.

"You could give me a couple handkerchiefs for Beck," said Mrs. Sherman. "I'll surprise him tomorrow morning when he comes to dress my hair."

"Good," said Si. "Larry, you all set?"

Larry held up a white silk evening scarf monogrammed in black and white. "You did me proud, Si."

Si, round and light as a soap bubble, arrested his bouncing motion. "You're looking wonderful, Larry," he said.

"He should rest more," said their mother, bursting out with it. "Larry, where you went this afternoon?"

"No place much, ma," said Larry, looking so excited that Mrs. Sherman got up from the love seat rather slowly and went to him, placing the back of her hand against his forehead.

"Has he fever, ma?" asked Emma.

"Of course not!" said Mrs. Sherman crossly. "Larry, you feel all right?"

"I feel fine," said Larry. "Belle, you're not the only one with an in at the Ocean Hunt Club. I met a friend of Paul Haydon's there today."

"Well, was he interested?" asked Claudie.

Carl, in the hall, looked from Claudie to Larry; Claudie, it seemed, knew plenty she wasn't talking about.

"He wants to buy three of my miniatures," said Larry.

"Wonderful!" said Claudie, at the same moment as Minnie said, "Oh, go way!"

But it was Theo who really put his foot in it. First he chuckled, and then he smiled all over his handsome face. "Somebody offered you real money for those pictures?" said Theo, who wouldn't have hurt a fly; "Larry, grab it before he changes his mind."

They all watched Larry try to think of an answer, they saw his beaten smile in the direction of Theo.

"My God, Carl," Theo was muttering, in the hall, "I didn't mean a thing by that—"

"What happened to the dinner?" said Mrs. Sherman, with an angry look towards Theo. "Simon, you could have given those girls their presents after we've eaten." She went out to the kitchen, and her children watched her go in silence.

Emma looked over at Miss Wilson, draped in her bright shawl, at Lena, with her rosary wrapped around her fingers. She phrased her question carefully.

"When is Flo getting back?" she asked Si. "You don't happen to know if she got two cables from me? She never answered."

"Cables?" said Si vaguely. "Flo won't be back yet awhile."

"I suppose she's having too good a time," said Minnie, with her humblest smile.

Si's jowls shook a little. He told Minnie that Flo had left Carlsbad ahead of him, and added, to everyone, that ma's gall bladder was bothering her again. Emma asked indignantly how he thought he could tell about ma's health when he'd been away all summer.

"Just the same," said Si. He shut the trunk, and said he was going to wash up for dinner. He went out into the hall where Carl stood alone now; Theo had tiptoed away. Miss Wilson said:

"Such a generous man, Mr. Simon!"

"*Ach, ja, herrlich!*" murmured Lena.

"Isn't he, though?" answered Si's sisters, but when Miss Wilson and Lena had gone, Emma added, "He's generous on Joe's money."

Carl saw that Si, beside him, was laughing silently again.

"Thanks for the neckties," said Carl, "they're very choice. What did you get for yourself?"

"Me? What do I need?" said Si.

Carl watched him start up the stairs to the tiny room on the top floor, between the children and the servants, which he used when he was home.

Carl watched him, heard the old lady call from the dining room that the soup was on the table, what was everyone waiting for; he saw Claudie put her arm through Larry's and hug it to her as they passed under the chandelier festooned with moths, saw Minnie, Theo, Emma pass by, heard Susan running over the gravel outside in the dusk, felt a presence beyond the screen door, turned, and saw his daughter, new doll in her arms, watching him. He came awake.

"Isn't it about time for you to get to bed, Babs?"

Babs pressed her cheek to the doll's black hair.

"It's not late, father."

Claudie called to him from the dining room, and Carl joined the others.

SI DUCKED into Joe's office next morning, dropped six handkerchiefs on his desk, and said, in answer to Joe's inquiry about his trip, that it had been O.K.

"See anything of Flo?" asked Joe.

"I had coffee with her a couple of times in Carlsbad," said Si. "She sends her love."

Joe nodded.

"Does Larry expect to show up here Monday?" he asked. "He say anything to you?"

"Not a word," said Si.

Joe turned away, and Si left, going through the other offices to shake hands all round and unload presents. Then he came into the cage, clasped Taylor's arms in warm greeting, and climbed on to the high stool next to Taylor's. Taylor was so pleased that Si was back he had trouble getting to work; he held his pen over a ledger while he glanced sideways under the green eyeshade and whispered what had gone on while Si was away. Si added columns of figures expertly, listened at the same time, and asked questions when Taylor seemed to be running down.

"How did Larry make out here?" said Si.

Taylor shook his head.

"Not good," he said. "I'm not sure, he might do all right if he paid some attention, but—"

"So you did his work and yours," said Si.

"Well, I'm glad to see you back," said Taylor, and then Joe sent for him. He came back a few minutes later and put an open letter on his desk; the envelope was printed with the name of the Hotel Adlon, in Berlin. Si reached out and picked it up.

"From your sister Flora," said Taylor.

"Keep an eye out for Joe," said Si. He slipped out two sheets of paper covered with Flora's small up-hill writing which hit a high spot at the end of every line. Flora wrote that she needed Joe's advice, in fact, she said, he was the only human being she could count on to advise her in a terribly important decision which was whether or not to marry a man she had known slightly—"to say hello to at the Opera"—for some years; this man was a lawyer, Max Dreyfus, supposed to be very good, some of the stars at the Met never signed a contract until he had approved it, but Flora depended on Joe to look him up as he alone could do and then to advise her about marrying him; with almost no punctuation Flora went on to ask Joe to tell her frankly what he thought about her marrying before she sailed for home which she wouldn't dream of doing if he said not to but Max was in Europe now and they could spend their honeymoon on the steamer and not take Max away from his law practice a second time but of course if Joe said no she wouldn't and what did he think, and then, seeming not to stop for breath, Flo finished by saying that she knew Joe would be as wonderful as ever—had she told him how everyone she ran into in Europe asked for her wonderful brother Joe?—and that he would know how to break the news of the marriage to ma, ma *listened* to Joe, and she really didn't know how she'd ever thank him for everything, the check when she sailed and so much consideration and kindness and, Love, Flo.

Si looked up from the letter.

"She's a bird!" he said. "Why'd Joe give you this?"

"For the address," said Taylor. "I'm to bring it back right after I've sent the cable."

Si waited.

"The cable is to say O.K. Joe," said Taylor. "I'm wiring a thousand dollars with it. It's a wedding present, but no one's to know till he tells Mrs. Sherman."

Si had told his mother last night, and her comment had been, "Good! It's better Flo gets married than bums around for a couple months more." His jowls shook a little, and he said nothing of this to Taylor.

"So he's giving her his permission," said Si.

"Yes," said Taylor.

"That's good," said Si. "The wedding was yesterday."

34

MRS. SHERMAN stopped in the hall to pull the hi-lo bulb to a glimmer; she had been checking up on supplies for tomorrow's Sunday dinner, and general orderliness, now that those girls were out of the kitchen. She went to the porch and tramped down the steps to the driveway. Every now and then, during the summer, she continued her housekeeping outdoors, inspecting the grass within the ring of hydrangeas which sometimes the gardener neglected until the old lady caught him. She was alone; everyone must have gone upstairs to bed. She lifted one of the great, pyramid-shaped blossoms, and let it drop back, carefully, so that the dew would not spatter her. Before she returned to the city, the flowers would be cut, wrapped in newspaper, and brought in to stand before the gas-log in her parlor all winter long, where their white petals changed to yellow, pink, blue-yellow, and, finally, purple, and were the only things in the five-story house that were never dusted. There they stood, while dusty death overtook them, in the parlor that was almost never used. When at last they crumbled, it was time to think of moving to the country again.

Her thoughts on immortality—all that stuff to pack and unpack and repack!—Mrs. Sherman walked slowly, crunching over the gravel. Out of sight of the house she stopped a moment, hand pressed to her side where pain flickered. She stood behind the wall of hydrangeas, hearing footsteps on the hollow

board floor of the porch. Someone was still up. Breathing short, shallow breaths, so as not to rouse the pain further, she waited. At last her hand loosened at her side; she had no time now to be sick.

All about her the crickets threw up a steady screen of sound; the maids on the back porch, in their armless, rockerless, retired chairs, laughed aloud, hushed. In the quiet that followed leaves tinkled when a breeze shook them, birds chirped their night calls in a checkered pattern. Another twinge caught the old lady, and she frowned, stirred impatiently, dismissed the pain. She got about her business, hefting the weight of a blossom as she might a melon in the market. Then she looked up at the house; Larry's light was out. She walked toward the porch and saw someone sitting on the railing.

"Carl?" she said. "It's you, Carl?"

"That's right," said Carl. "I thought I'd sit out here a while. Claudie won't be out of the bathroom for another twenty minutes. That's a conservative estimate."

Mrs. Sherman climbed the steps, and put her hand on Carl's shoulder; she was still housekeeping, still checking up.

"Carl, did Joe let you have that loan?"

"Everything's O.K.," said Carl.

"Carl?"

"I haven't heard," said Carl. "What the hell, that's his privilege."

Mrs. Sherman nodded. "Good night, Carl," she said. She climbed the stairs slowly. In the hall, she spoke to a row of closed doors. "Did anyone see to it that Larry took his drops?"

"I did, ma," said Claudie, letting the door swing back far enough to show her in frilled corset-cover and petticoat. The others doors opened, revealing Minnie, Emma, Belle, in various stages of preparation for bed.

"Cover yourselves up," said the old lady. "Shame on you!" She went to Larry's room and turned the knob softly.

"Ma? I'm awake," said Larry.

"Go to sleep, darling." She bent over him, and kissed his forehead.

"I—Ma, Monday's the day after tomorrow," said Larry. "I'll have to decide one way or the other."

His mother's hand tightened on Larry's shoulder; he felt steel under the padded fingers.

"Either way, who says it's final? You'll do what you want to do," said the old lady. "Tomorrow is another day. Sleep first."

"I'll try, ma. Good night."

Minnie moved the buttonhook, glove-stretcher, hand mirror, combs, brushes, picture frames, a quarter of an inch to the left. Theo did not notice, but when she pushed all these articles back a quarter of an inch to the right, he looked up from his copy of *Bar-X Stories*.

"Something wrong, Minnie?"

"I've got the willies," said his wife, drumming her fingers on the top of the bureau.

"Now, Minnie."

"Everybody's got it in for me," said Minnie. "Just because I try to keep in with Joe. As if they weren't all doing the same thing!" Her flat face changed shape, her pale eyes grew watery.

"You're imagining things," said Theo. Affectionate as ever, he held out his arms to her and she sat on his lap; he rocked her back and forth until she had calmed down. "Better?"

Minnie nodded.

"Well, then." Theo glanced at the Western still in his hand, and his lap took on the slightest possible slant. Minnie stood up.

"Aren't you coming to bed?" she asked.

"As soon as I've finished this story," said Theo. He looked up at Minnie and chuckled. "Oh, all right, dear. Aren't you sick of the old man after all this time?"

"The very idea!" said Minnie. It was just possibly the first time she had told the truth that day.

Belle, stark naked, stood before her mirror taking the pins out of her hair. She shook her head once, twice, took up her

hairbrush, and, while she brushed, did something she called thinking things out. Paul Haydon was coming out tomorrow for a visit. The last time Belle had seen him he had told of his progress with a judge he happened to know—my goodness, who didn't these swells happen to know!—whose influence was considerable in the New York courts, and who might be of some help to her in getting a divorce quickly and without scandal. When she thanked him, he said, "Belle, I'm very fond of you. You do realize that, don't you, dear?" Belle said they hardly knew each other. "Still, you do understand, Belle. I intend to see you often. But we'll keep out of pantries till your divorce comes through."

Belle put down the brush, looked at her image in the mirror, and thought out some more things. She had announced to Paul, with the positiveness of one smashing a set of china, that marriages between Christians and Jews did not work. Oh, I might have spoiled it all, she thought, but Paul had said only that once he might have agreed with her, but not now. He had not kissed her, though she had wanted him to so much that thought became momentarily difficult for her. Be serious, she told herself; did what he had said mean that he wanted to marry her? Belle could not be sure, and until she was she would hold to her disapproval of marriage between Jew and gentile. But—she backed away from the mirror, still gazing into it as into a pool, and thought things through. God was no problem in her life, nor in Paul's; properly approached, He would pull for them. Belle slipped her nightgown over her head, turned out the light and lay down. She fell asleep on a slow tide running for her into the future, which, really, she knew about; it was all decided. In that future she would settle down to a happy marriage in an egg, or English-basement house. Belle smiled; and they would be all proper and correct, with the warm naked nights to keep them going, and the blossoming formal garden by day.

Carl went upstairs to his bedroom and found the bathroom door closed. He was looking at it and thinking of his blood

pressure when the door opened and Claudie came out; she was wearing a crisp white wrapper tied with a pink ribbon. Carl's expression changed; Claudie was a very pretty woman —at times, today.

"What're you giving me such a funny look for?" she asked, pretending or even believing that she had not changed since last week or yesterday.

"What funny look?" said Carl.

"I don't know," said Claudie, wandering back to the bathroom and speaking through the punctuation of dental floss drawn between her teeth. "You looked different when you came home this afternoon."

"I am different, thanks God," said Carl. "I wonder how the old lady found out about—" He was undressing, and did not finish his sentence.

Claudie looked out of the bathroom doorway.

"Found out about what?" she asked. She picked up the shirt Carl had taken off. "How can you keep anything private in this house? Carl, you can't wear this any more. The cuffs are beginning to go."

"Maybe Morton can use it," said Carl. "You through in there?"

"Yes," said Claudie.

Carl went to wash, keeping to himself his surprise that Claudie had not insisted on knowing what the old lady had found out about. But when he told Claudie what he'd done today there'd be a scene for sure, thought Carl; he'd have to go very easy breaking it to her.

When he came back, Claudie had all his shirts out of the drawer where he kept them, and was examining each one for signs of wear. Carl walked past her, considering how to tell her, and got into bed.

Then he started all wrong.

"Listen, Claudie, you're not going to like this—"

"Carl, you'll have to order some new shirts. What won't I like?"

"Your dear brother Joe hasn't yet let me know about that

loan," said Carl, feeling tense. "So today I went to the Farmers' Loan and Trust."

"Well?" said Claudie. "I'm waiting."

"It was perfectly simple," said Carl, almost happily, in spite of the impending storm from Claudie. "I arranged for the loan within an hour. Furthermore I was treated like a gentleman from start to finish." Claudie did not stir, but Carl held up his hand to stop her. "Don't tell me Joe won't leave any money to the kids. It's still better this way. So I'm set," he said, and waited for the blow to fall.

"How long is it since you saw Joe?" asked Claudie.

"Six weeks this coming Tuesday," said Carl. "Enough is enough. I'm not mortgaging my human dignity, no matter what it may bring the children. Even money isn't that important."

Claudie looked at him.

"Does Joe know yet?" she asked.

"No," said Carl, watching Claudie and thinking about his blood pressure.

Claudie laughed. She stood up with the pile of Carl's shirts in her arms and began to put them away.

"I just wish I could see Joe's face when he hears about it," she said.

How were you supposed to figure women? Carl wondered, sore from the blow that had not fallen. He was even momentarily sorry for himself, and then he realized that Claudie had closed the bureau-drawer and was not braiding her hair before approaching the bed.

"Here, come here," said Carl, and she came to his bed. "Darling," said Carl, forgetting his blood pressure—a man had to die of something someday—and not interested, just then, in trying to figure woman.

Emma could not sleep; it seemed to her that the house was full of rustles and murmurs, whispers—Emma was alerted to the presence of love as if to danger. Belle, in the room next to hers, had caught a prize; Belle's troubles, which had ignobly

softened Emma's life, were over. Belle, her beautiful sister! Emma's own husband was a constant reminder of Belle's beauty; Aaron had brought him home to dinner one night, and, looking up the stairs, he had seen Belle. "That one for me," he told Aaron, and only when Belle persisted in her folly of marrying Seth Hoffman had he finally taken Emma.

Emma sat up and turned over her pillow, punching it hard before setting her head unrestfully upon it once more. Theo loved Minnie, Carl, always loving Claudie, would be accepted by her again now that she was returning to normal. Only she was loveless, with her husband or without; the feast was never spread for her. Emma felt helpless, suddenly, and was glad to hear a sound in the hall. She sprang up.

Susan was outside, barefoot, in cotton pyjamas askew over her breasts, the legs in wide rings showing her honey-colored ankles; her hair was a great brand of chestnut fire.

"Susan," said her mother, "did you want something?"

"Just I had to go to the bathroom, mother," said Susan, half-asleep.

"You should wear your slippers," said Emma, and watched Susan go back to her room. What a lovely child she had! Shouldn't that comfort her, a daughter made for love, as Susan was? But Emma felt deserted in all that household, loveless, surrounded by the loved, the wanted. She got back into bed, gave a great sigh, and lay wakeful in the murmuring house.

BABS GOT out to the porch before anyone had picked up the Sunday papers. She was alone, a strange sensation in the crowded house; she sighed, not sadly, and, bending over, slipped out the funnies. She clasped the funnies to her chest and stomach and tiptoed to the railing. Behind her, the chairs were turned to the wall with rockers uptilted, looking as if they prayed.

Dew glittered on the clipped lawn, like Aunt Belle's spangled *robe* from Paris; two spider webs on the grass were set with rhinestones; the wet gravel shone like a treasure trove. Asters and dahlias, the tough old flowers of autumn, were coming into bloom, and a late rambler rose, rusted at the edges, shivered as Babs caught at it; drops of water spotted her white shoes.

"Oh, stop it!" whispered Babs. She heard Davie climbing downstairs flatfooted; he dashed to the screen door and hung by one hand from the latch. His blue eyes were as big as saucers, staring at his sister, his yellow hair in a Dutch cut flopped when he swung from the latch; he lifted his foot and kicked at the screen. The wires whined.

"Sh!" whispered Babs. "Look, I've got the funnies."

Davie shut his mouth. Babs opened the door and came in. Davie held up his hands for the funnies.

"No, Davie! Come on. I'll read them to you."

"Father read," said Davie. He got upstairs, using hands, feet, knees and elbows. Babs followed, trying to go so softly that she would muffle the racket Davie was making. There was a rustle all through the house, and she had no more right to the fresh-baked funnies than any of the others. She was in a tearing hurry to get out of sight, but she remembered to knock at the door of her parents' bedroom.

"Babs, Davie?" said her father.

"May we come in?" whispered Babs.

"Come on in," said her father.

Babs turned the knob, and Davie ran in ahead of her. She shut the door behind her and started forward and almost fell over Davie. Then she, too, stood still. Mother and father were side by side in one of the beds, cheerful, warm, rosy.

"Well," said father, "don't you kiss us good morning?"

Davie, less put off than Babs by this rare atmosphere, ran to the bed and scrambled on to it. Babs followed.

"Davie, you don't have to kick me in the stomach," said mother, and she caught Davie to her and kissed his neck till he squirmed. There was room for Babs on the edge of the bed. Father began to read Happy Hooligan.

Mother gave a great, happy yawn.

"Oh, damn it, I may as well get up," she said.

"What's your hurry?" said father.

Claudie slid out of bed and went into the bathroom. Babs moved up to the warm hollow her body had left, rested her chin on her father's shoulder, and listened. She was relieved and gay in this strange peace and joyousness, though still, and always, like the alligator who swallowed the alarm clock in *Peter Pan*. The clock was ticking now, keeping time to her mother's moods. Babs leaned against her father, listening; it was a cave man's Sunday morning, safe against the world with sunlight washing over the drawn blinds, the bed warm with human heat and love, smelling of home. Babs went off guard; she floated, half-entranced, in peace.

"Here, here, you," said Carl, "you're falling asleep. Babs, are you listening?"

"Well, of course, father!"

She pressed herself closer to him, and he stretched his arm around her and pinched her bottom.

"Oh, father!"

"All right, now, pay attention."

She paid such close attention to this flower, safety, come upon so unexpectedly in the jungle, that her expression became distant, even reverent.

Claudie walked out of the bathroom with the white wrapper hung over her shoulders; under it, she was naked. Carl looked up from turning a page.

"You planning to go to breakfast like that?" he asked. He smiled, looking at his wife. He was a modest man, himself, but the night had gone well for them. "Now, you kids. I'll read you the Katzenjammers and then I'm going to chase you out of here."

Claudie dressed, in pink glove-silk shirt and drawers, pink brocade corset buckled down the front and laced up the back. She put on a batiste corset-cover and frilled batiste petticoat. She pulled on white silk stockings. Then she got into her wrapper and combed her hair. Finally she went to her closet, opened the door, and stood there thinking.

"Oh, well," she said, almost to herself, "I might as well wear the linen I got at Lichtenstein's sale. I don't know what I'm saving it for. Carl, what do you think?"

"Wear it," said Carl. "It's not going to do you much good next winter."

So she put on the simple (expensive) dress of white handkerchief linen piped in Alice blue, settled the belt, stepped into white buckskin shoes, took a pleased look at herself in the cheval glass, and turned to her family.

"What's the verdict?" she asked.

"Very nice," said Carl.

Babs nodded solemnly, and her mother gave her a brilliant smile.

"What's the matter with you, Gloomy Gus?" asked her mother, with dazzling cheer.

The clock began ticking again in Babs, and she slipped from the bed. She answered Claudie shyly that she wasn't a Gloomy Gus, and she beat it out of there, running from her knowledge of the future.

EMMA JACOBSON came in to Sunday breakfast by way of the faded cretonne parlor and the card room. She did not sit down; she continued her explorations, running a finger over the sideboard and inspecting it sternly.

"Dust," she said, her head shaking a little more than usual. "That girl simply isn't thorough." She tried the other end of the sideboard and encountered Judy's puzzle. "What's this doing here? Nothing ever gets put away." She left the room without having looked at anyone seated at the table.

Carl winked at Claudie.

"Sitting Bull's on the warpath," he said. "What bit her?"

"She's in a bird of a humor, all right," said Claudie.

"I'm getting out," said Theo. "Carl, how about some tennis?"

"Suits me," said Carl.

Mrs. Sherman came in, and Carl went to pull out her chair for her.

"Where's the *Bundkuchen* I made yesterday?" said the old lady. "I'm not going to have it all eaten in the kitchen." She rang the bell, but the waitress did not appear. Instead, Emma came in from the pantry and sat down.

Emma looked older than her mother, thought Carl, from lack of love, giving and getting; Emma was gray, shaky, and, today, raging. Carl, in this moment of ease, was sorry for Emma, and his thin face showed it.

Mrs. Sherman saw and misunderstood, thinking that Joe was responsible. Once more she rang the silver bell at her plate, and then she pushed back her chair and advanced to the swing-door. She slapped it open with the flat of her hand and was heard to say, through the flapping door, "Well, what's wrong?" A few seconds later she returned with a platter of coffee cake and urged Carl to take a piece. She did not take any for herself. She kept silent for an instant, and then she turned on Emma.

"Now you listen to me!" she said. "I'm running this house. You don't interfere. That girl's almost crying, the way you talked to her. A perfectly decent girl."

"She's taking advantage of you," said Emma.

"That will do," said Mrs. Sherman.

Emma's hand shook so that she had to try twice to get the coffee cup to her mouth. Still, she managed to look offended, which dissipated some of Carl's sympathy; she was rigidly correct, was Sitting Bull, he thought, but she had not charity. When she finished her coffee she folded her napkin and stood up.

"Ma, you'll side with anyone against me," she said. "You always have."

Once more Carl heard the child speaking through the hard mouth. Emma went away, Claudie and Theo followed, and Carl was alone with Mrs. Sherman.

"They're all jealous of each other," she said. "They always have been. How you can love nine children the same?"

Well, you couldn't, Carl admitted to himself, but he did not like the idea. The old lady's unequal love for her children did not bother her, and Carl found this admirable: inequities were a part of life, Adelaide Sherman was a part of life. Do her something. Now she surprised him by touching his arm.

"Carl, you stop worrying," she said. "Eat up your cake."

After a while the brothers-in-law, Carl and Theo, cleared out, and their kids followed them to chase tennis balls, keep score, and stay away from the house.

Susan tried to go along, but her mother nabbed her. She was sent back to her room to do her hair again, "and this time try to look like a lady when you've finished."

Susan said, "Ma—"

"That will do, Susan," said Emma. "I've told you you're too young to put your hair up."

"Yes, ma," said Susan. She pulled out hairpins, tied a ribbon around the doubled-up stick of chestnut hair, and kept her eyes on the Ryan yard through the window of her room. Finally she came quietly downstairs, and her mother popped out of the parlor to inspect her.

"That's better," said Emma. "Sometimes I think you'll never learn."

"I'm sorry, ma," said Susan, in the front hall.

"Where are you going, Susan?"

"Just to the tennis court, ma."

"Well, all right."

Susan walked down to the tennis court, went on walking, came to the hedge between the houses and pushed through the gap.

"Look at me!" said Susan, to Christopher Ryan, who was delighted to see her. "My hair's all full of leaves. You still got that comb in the barn, Christopher?"

"Well, sure," said Chris, and Susan walked into the barn, past the horses, and sat down on the hay. "Gosh!" said Christopher, and stopped, afraid he had said the wrong thing.

"Oh, Chris," said Susan, "ma's on the warpath today. It's just awful over there."

Christopher sat down next to her, and neither of them gave the comb another thought, nuzzling each other in a timid fury.

Emma barged into Larry's room to demand if he had taken his drops.

"I took them," said Larry.

"Larry, you don't look at all well," said Emma, believing she showed concern for her brother. "I think the doctor's

making a mistake to let you go back tomorrow. That is, if you are going back tomorrow."

Larry gave her what she classed as a very peculiar smile, and said nothing. Immediately she felt large and out of place, a rock or boulder in the room. She stood, immobile, saying that she was going. Larry did not seem to hear her, with that peculiar smile still left on his face as if forgotten there when the spirit fled. For an instant Emma knew real pain for her young brother; she reached out a trembling hand to him.

Larry did not see the hand, and Emma went away. Her mother called to her from the hall downstairs. "You're to leave that boy alone." Belle asked Emma into her bedroom to do her up the back, and Emma obliged, turning her sister around near the window so she could see the tiny hooks and eyes that fastened Belle's white lingerie dress. Emma's silence, while she worked, was so loud that Belle answered it.

"I just felt like wearing this," she said. "Claudie's got on her Lichtenstein. I thought I'd be festive, too."

"So I notice," said Emma, dressed appropriately for no one to look at her in a plain gray chambray skirt and blouse.

Belle, smiling at her shadowy image in the cheval glass across the room, said:

"I'm having tea at the Hunt Club this afternoon. You were all wrong about that, Emma."

"I don't know what you let them make this waistband so tight for," said Emma. "Pull in your stomach."

Belle took a deep breath.

"Paul Haydon said he may drop in this morning to say hello to ma," said Belle, her voice slightly distorted by the way she was holding her diaphragm. "I told him I think he likes ma better than he does me. All right? Can I breathe now?"

"One—two more hooks," said Emma. "Belle, you won't thank me for telling you, but Joe isn't going to like your seeing this Paul Haydon. He sent a friend of his to Larry about buying those miniatures—"

"What's wrong with Larry making some money on his own,

may I ask?" said Belle.

Joe's two sisters looked at and away from each other in the mirror.

"Did I say there was anything wrong?" asked Emma. "But you know what happened when Joe ran into Paul Haydon here—"

"Yes, I know, and it's a miracle I ever saw Paul again after that." Belle took two deliberate, deep slow breaths, and went across the room fast, every ruffle fluttering. "Ma? Ma, Emma says Joe will be sore about my seeing Paul—"

"*Schon wieder* Joe!" said Mrs. Sherman, coming upstairs. "Now what?"

"I only said what I thought, ma," said Emma. "Belle had to be told."

"Somebody elected you?" said Mrs. Sherman.

"That's the thanks you get!" said Emma, and retired.

Belle wanted her mother to stay, to encourage her, but Mrs. Sherman had gone. Belle shut the door, consulted her blooming image in the mirror, and spoke to herself.

"I'm a chump to listen to her," she murmured. "Emma was always jealous." Belle turned away and sat down at her desk. She'd have to take her chances with Joe; she certainly wasn't going to stop seeing Paul. How marvelous that she should love Paul, and that he should have plenty of money into the bargain!

Life is hard, thought Belle conscientiously, there is always a lot to contend with, sickness, age—and besides she didn't have her divorce yet; but her pretty face was smooth, and her mind was made up. She pulled a sheet of writing paper to her, dipped her pen in ink, and wrote, Belle Sherman Haydon, Mrs. Paul Haydon, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Haydon, and then she began to sketch monograms so that she could give Tiffany's an idea when the time came.

Emma wandered to the porch where she tidied the morning-glory vines of yellow leaves, and came back inside to drop the leaves into a wastebasket. All the time she was bustling

about bent on one good deed or another she felt vaguely righteous and sustained by the knowledge. But now she stopped by the table in the children's dining room where a postcard lay beside the phone. Emma picked up the card, recognizing Flora's handwriting, small, sharp, climbing upward at the right in a rattle of high spirits like a burst of firecrackers. "Hope all well at home. I keep busy. Ma, take care of yourself. Love to all, Flora." Emma turned the card and saw the Obelisk rising in the center of the Place de la Concorde, above the arched waters of the fountain; the statue of Strasbourg was, as when Emma had last seen it, hung with crape and mourning wreaths. "I keep busy," Flora had written, and Emma knew what that meant. She stood motionless, a solid, middle-aged woman with no youth left in any corner of her soul, assailed by misery on hearing the echo of her sister's joy-in-living, and doubly miserable—she was a good woman—that this should make her unhappy.

Claudie coaxed Larry out to the lawn to play croquet; Dr. Friedlander had told her that a little light exercise would do him good. He played listlessly at first, but the bright day seemed to warm him, and he pleased Claudie by getting way ahead of her. She aimed for him and missed, and Larry knocked her ball to Kingdom Come, all the way to the freshly clipped hedge. They went together to look for it, but even when the orange ball was plain in sight on the earth under the privet neither of them stooped. They stood, swinging their mallets gently, backs to the world.

"Tomorrow's Monday," said Claudie, which was the first thing on her mind and the last thing she wanted to say.

"You think I'd forgotten?" Larry took a real cut at the hedge. "I'm going back. You knew that."

Claudie nodded, but did not look at her brother; her glance was fixed on the hedge, to where, inside the rigid outlines, a spike of cream-colored flowers bloomed secretly.

"What choice have I got?" said Larry. His voice began to sound coarse and ashamed. "I've got as much use for money

as the next one. Joe would say more use—"

Claudie nodded again.

"Oh, I give up!" said Larry. He swung about, flung his mallet from him in a wide, dangerous arc, and almost ran toward the kitchen porch.

Claudie watched him go; she bent for the croquet ball, walked over the grass as slowly as if she waded through water, picked up Larry's mallet, and tumbled everything into a wooden chest at the side of the house.

Her mother, shadowy behind the screened window of the card room, spoke to her.

"What's wrong with Larry?"

"Oh, ma!" said Claudie. She sounded as though she pronounced sentence of death. "He's going back to Sherman's tomorrow."

"Yes," said her mother. "The doctor says it's all right for him to go if he takes it a little easy the first week. Claudie, I'm waiting."

Claudie's face flushed.

"Couldn't we stop kidding ourselves once? Joe is what's wrong with Larry."

There was a long pause.

"What Joe does to Lawrence?" asked Mrs. Sherman then.

"He humiliates him," said Claudie. "He never lets up on Larry. Ma, you know what Joe's like."

She got no reply, and when, finally, she looked up, the window was empty.

Mrs. Sherman was on her way to the front hall, where she paused.

"Emma? Come here," she said.

Emma put down the newspaper she was reading and came in from the parlor.

"Did you want me, ma?"

"Ring up Joe at the office," said Mrs. Sherman.

"Joe already phoned, ma," said Emma. "He'll be out on the three o'clock."

"Did you hear me?" said Mrs. Sherman. "Call Joe at the office."

She followed Emma and waited while she sat down at the phone and gave the number.

"What shall I tell him, ma?" asked Emma. "Hello, Joe? Just a minute, ma has a message—" She looked towards her mother, but Mrs. Sherman snatched the phone from the table and spoke into the mouthpiece.

"Joe. You're to get right out here. Take the first train."

Emma tried to hand her mother the receiver, but Mrs. Sherman shook it off impatiently and strode from the room. Emma had the receiver to her ear, but only a breathing silence came over the wire, and then Joe hung up. Emma, gray as a ghost, unnoticed as a ghost, began to roll up Flora's postcard; she had never heard her mother talk into a phone, no one had ever heard that.

37

JOE'S LEFT hand had come down, disconnecting the phone, but he still held the receiver to his ear and a wash of silence, like the sound within a shell, took the place of his mother's voice.

"Ma?" he said, and shook his head heavily like a dumb beast. He had been enjoying the Sunday peace of his office, reading the financial news in the *Times*. Now he hung up, took his feet off the desk, and leaned forward; he opened a top drawer and shuffled through papers looking for a timetable. Before he found it, shoved into a corner, he pushed aside the statement Carl Nathan had given him weeks ago; Joe did not recognize it. He consulted the timetable, and called his apartment.

"Hello?" said Kate Wilkins.

"I'm going out to Long Island to dinner," said Joe. "Be back some time late this afternoon or evening."

"Is everything all right, dear?" asked the gentle voice.

Joe frowned.

"What should be wrong? Well, see you later."

"Yes, Joe."

Joe poured a drink, and sat looking over his glass to the empty buildings beyond the window. Sunlight ran thin over their flat surfaces, silence spun like motes in the air. Drink in hand, Joe walked to the safe and tried the handle, walked to

the crystal bell over the ticker where sunlight splintered to fractions on the surface. He took out one of Si's linen handkerchiefs and dusted the crystal. Then he pulled the blinds against the flooding light, finished his drink and put the glass away. He put on his Panama hat and went out, carrying the *Times* folded to the financial section.

In the dead-silent hall outside he rang for the elevator and waited a long time. An old man ran the elevator on Sundays; Joe nodded at him when he finally showed up.

"Nice day for the country, Mr. Sherman," said the old man.

Joe did not answer; at the ground floor he thrust a dollar into the old man's hand and did not wait to be thanked.

The old man watched Joe walk through the echoing marble entrance hall, looked at the tip for a while, then slowly put it into his pocket.

Morton was not at the depot to meet him, and Joe took a hack. No one was on the porch; Joe went round the side of the house to the stable where Morton was grooming Carrots. The gravel on the driveway had been freshly raked, but a few seared walnut leaves rode the ripples. Out of sight, at the tennis court, a racket sang, and a child's voice cried:

"Point, game, set!"

Joe stood before Morton and the dancing horse.

"You too occupied to meet my train, Morton?" he asked.

Morton went on brushing Carrots' shining flank.

"I didn't get no orders to get you, Mr. Joe," said Morton. "Maybe they didn't know what train you were taking."

"They had to know," said Joe. "There was only the one."

Carrots switched at a fly with his tail, shivered a shoulder where the fly tried to settle, tossed his head up and down.

Joe stood looking at those two, Morton and Carrots, and a question burst from him.

"Larry been out much lately?"

"Well, sir, he go out now and then," said Morton.

Joe walked away without another word, and Morton straightened up, leaned against Carrots, and watched him go.

"Come on out, you kids," he said.

Judy and Babs edged out of Carrots' box-stall.

"Uncle Joe, ugh!" said Babs.

Judy looked suddenly like a grown-up lady.

"You shouldn't talk like that, Babs," she said. She wasn't grown-up, though; she didn't stop there. "He's a millionaire, and he's going to leave us lots of money."

"I anyway can't stand him," said Babs.

Judy looked cautiously at Morton, and all three of them began to laugh.

Joe went over the lawn where his footsteps made no sound on the grass. In the shadow of the Panama hat his face was dark, eyes half-hidden under the stained, heavy lids, mouth concealed by the dark moustache drooping over his lips.

Gisela watched him come to her kitchen door, hissed a command to the waitress to shut up laughing, and gave Mr. Joe Sherman good morning when he opened the door. Mr. Sherman gave her one of his looks, by way, possibly, of greeting, and when he was gone Gisela muttered that that one was *behext*. "*Unheimlich!*" said the waitress. Gisela had backed against the drainboard of the sink when Mr. Joe came in as if to hide something, though all that was there was two halves of an eggshell and the yolk of an egg in a chipped custard dish; earlier, Mr. Larry had run through her kitchen in a fury, turned, and asked peacefully for the white of an egg. The last time he asked for such a thing had been the night of his heart attack, and Gisela, not knowing what the egg-white was for, gathered from Mr. Larry that his purpose was secret and perhaps even guilty. So she backed against the drainboard to protect Mr. Larry, somehow, from Mr. Joe. All this blew through her mind as unseen as a breeze. She told the waitress to set another place for dinner, and added that the children would get only half a soft-shell crab apiece.

Carl was in the hall closet, fastening his racket into its press. The house was unusually silent, and he had met no one coming

in from the court; the family must have gone to the beach for a swim. Good! came into his mind, more as reflex than as thought. But when he was halfway up the stairs he heard the soft plop of a cork drawn from a bottle, and over the banister he saw Joe Sherman in the card room, back to Carl, pouring himself a drink. Carl climbed, fast but soundless, to the second floor, went down the hall past all the closed doors, to Larry's, which was half-open.

Carl tapped, a chair was pushed back, and Larry looked out.

"Oh, Carl," he said. "Come in."

He stepped aside, and Carl saw, on Larry's desk, a cup without a handle, tubes of paint, paintbrushes, a muffin tin, and an oblong of white paper on which a small colored picture was laid. Like Gisela, Carl made the connection between this outfit and Larry's illness. He stepped into the room.

"I thought I might as well get back to work on this," said Larry, as if he had already explained to Carl what he was doing. His manner was easy; on the bureau stood his japanned box with the lid up, easy and confident as Larry himself. "What the hell, I'll have to have a balance to all the hell downtown."

"Good idea," said Carl, approving all Larry's information.

Larry sat down, asking Carl's pardon as he did so; he was still too pale, even for Larry. Well, thought Carl, a heart attack in a man as young as Larry was a bad sign, but at least Larry was cheerful today, and that was half the battle.

"Funny thing, Carl," said Larry, "I blew up with Claudie a little while ago, and right afterward I felt fine."

"Good," said Carl. "Look, Larry, Joe's downstairs. He didn't see me. I just wanted to tip you off."

Larry's hand moved like a shield over the colored picture.

"Thanks, Carl," he said. "I'd just as soon not have to explain to Joe what I'm up to here."

"Keep the door shut," said Carl. "Dinner'll be a cinch."

Larry nodded. "You're a sport," he said.

"Forget it," said Carl.

Larry closed himself in, and Carl, a man who needed privacy

and wanted it for others as well, was pleased with himself. He went to his room, and, hearing Joe start up the stairs, he instantly began to behave out of character; inside the bedroom he turned and listened at the door left open a crack.

Heavy, almost stealthy steps went past him, and Larry's door was flung open so suddenly that it banged against the chiffonier.

A chair scratched over the floor, and silence followed.

Claudie, sitting unnoticed by the window, said:

"May I ask what you think you're doing?"

Carl shook his head, and both of them heard Larry speak out.

"Suppose you try knocking first, next time," said Larry. "What do you want?"

Carl smiled.

"The kid's going to be all right," he said.

"Talk about Minnie snooping!" said Claudie.

Carl blushed.

"This is different," he said, but he put out his hand to shut the door, and stopped.

Mrs. Sherman shouted from downstairs:

"Where's Joe? How did he sneak in without I saw him?"

Joe said mildly, "I just wanted to have a little talk with Larry."

"So I see," said Mrs. Sherman, upstairs now. "Go into my room and wait for me."

Mrs. Sherman picked up the bottle of digitalis on Larry's bureau and tried to count out the drops, but her hand shook so that she had to put down the dropper and spoon.

"I don't need those, honestly," said Larry.

"Anyway lay down a little before dinner, darling," said Mrs. Sherman. "Everything'll be all right. Don't you worry."

"I'm not worrying, ma," said Larry.

Mrs. Sherman shook her head, and went away. She entered her room, passed Joe, and lowered the window blinds as if to keep off eavesdroppers. But her voice was clear and carrying when she spoke.

"Joe," she said.

In the darkened room, Joe stood waiting for his mother to sit down. When, instead, she braced her back against the bureau, he pulled a straight chair about facing her and sat down.

"What's all this about, ma?" he asked easily.

Mrs. Sherman's memory of Larry's pale face, cold as stone it seemed to her, was so acute, she was so frightened for the life of her son, that she could not at once talk about it. She went to minor matters, her voice strong.

"You're to leave Belle alone," she said.

"Who's interfering with Belle?" said Joe.

"You're getting ready to," said the old lady. She waited; but Joe did not deny this. "I forbid it." She moved past Joe, whose hooded eyes followed her progress, and sat down. "What about the loan to Carl?"

"He came crying to you?"

"No," said Mrs. Sherman. "I found out."

"He'll get the money," said Joe.

"After you kept him waiting for weeks."

"I have other things to think about."

Mrs. Sherman seemed to be listening for something other than Joe's words. Her head was turned away when she answered.

"You'll tell Carl about that loan before you leave here today."

Joe shrugged.

"Yes," said his mother, but she was out of her chair, out of the room, moving fast to the sound she thought she had heard from Larry's room. She looked in at Larry, who was dipping a paintbrush into the muffin tin, and then, she could not help herself, she came to his side and felt his forehead with the back of her hand, as she used to do when he was a little boy and she thought he had a fever.

"Perfectly normal, ma," said Larry. "Stop worrying about me."

"Who's worrying?" said the old lady. "I leave that to

Claudie. Here, I'll shut your door again, so you don't get disturbed."

She went back to her room, not seeing, or not caring, that the Nathans' door was open, letting a narrow bar of daylight into the shadowed hall. Joe came up the stairs with shot glass and bottle of whisky. He set the glass on Mrs. Sherman's bureau and poured a drink.

"An appetizer before dinner," he said, and sat down, leaving the whisky bottle standing between silver shoehorn and silver-backed clothesbrush. The bottle gleamed dully, and was reflected in the looking-glass; from where Mrs. Sherman sat in her armchair it cut off the silver-framed photograph of her husband. She moved so that she could meet his calm gaze; his hair was cropped short in the German fashion, and his features were rounded in the round face, all at peace with one another; he looked, the family sometimes said proudly, like a Roman Catholic priest. He looked, Mrs. Sherman thought now, like an honest man, and he had been one.

"All right, ma," said Joe. "What else is on your mind?"

"Larry," said Mrs. Sherman. Fear made the word come out broken.

"Larry!" growled Joe. He got up to pour himself another drink. "That young pup's getting ready to throw away the chance of a lifetime. Claudie's encouraging him." He drank, and, lumbering a little like a bear, he took up the bottle again. Holding it, he faced around to his mother, who sat motionless, hands flat on the arms of her chair.

"Larry is going back to Sherman's tomorrow," said the old lady, winning the round.

Joe's lids winked shut over his eyes before her steady glance, and his face flushed darkly.

"Also," said Mrs. Sherman, "from now on you're going to treat him like a human being."

"Larry gets the same treatment as everybody else," said Joe. "Ma, keep out of this. I run this family."

"Put down that bottle," said Mrs. Sherman. "You've had too much already."

Joe deliberately poured himself another drink and set the bottle before his father's photograph.

"All right," said Mrs. Sherman, as if accepting the gage. "Does Larry owe any money?"

Joe gave a kind of laugh.

"He lost four hundred dollars gambling on margin like the jackass he is."

"You never gambled," said his mother.

"That's different. I know what I'm doing."

"*Ach, so,*" said Mrs. Sherman.

"Besides which," said Joe, hurling this item at his mother, "Morton lent him a hundred dollars that he'll never see again. How do you like borrowing from the servants, ma?"

"Tomorrow you'll give Larry enough money to pay what he owes," said Mrs. Sherman.

"I'll give him nothing."

Mrs. Sherman told him briefly to pay Larry out of her own interest in Sherman's. "You seem to forget how much of the business I own."

"You own! Claudie owns! I'm sick and tired hearing what pa didn't leave all of you. With your share in the business you haven't half enough to spend all the money you do."

Mrs. Sherman stood up.

"You'll pay Larry five hundred dollars tomorrow," she said.

"Larry should pay off his own debts," said Joe. "He wants to be independent, let him be independent."

Mrs. Sherman pulled up a blind, and light burst like a judgment on the dark figure of Joe. He did not stir, even his eyelids did not flicker; he was secure in his power, which was money, in the force of his hate.

"Now, ma, no reason for a scene," he said. "If it'll make you happy I'll pay up for Larry."

"You'll pay up!" said his mother. She went to the bureau and thrust aside the bottle of whisky. "No wonder you try to hide your father's picture."

"Ma," said Joe, in a wondering, warning tone.

"I'll ma you!" said Mrs. Sherman. "*Du Dieb!* Thief!"

"Keep still."

"You stole from your father. I should have let him throw you out the way he wanted to." Mrs. Sherman gave a great sob, but her voice was steady. "You're no better now. You don't give a damn for anyone, just so you can run them."

"Ma—"

"Who do you think you are, anyway?"

Joe had no answer. His edges seemed blurred as he turned and shambled from the room. Mrs. Sherman followed him downstairs, and called into the pantry:

"Mr. Joe won't be staying to dinner."

38

CARL HAD listened to everything, not moving from the shameful door ajar. (But this was different.) At some time Claudie moved so close to him that her arm and hip touched his own, as Babs might do when she was frightened but too proud to say so. He patted her shoulder, but she melted from under his hand.

Now, in the loud silence, he turned and saw her sitting forlorn on the bed.

"What was that last all about?" he asked.

Claudie shook her head and began to cry hard but not frighteningly.

"Tell you what," said Carl, "I'll get you a schnapps. It'll do you good."

Claudie nodded, and Carl went downstairs; he approached the card room cautiously, but it was empty. When he passed the faded rose-cretonne parlor, carrying two drinks on a tray, newspapers were shaken out, crackling. Carl looked in and there sat Si, cheerful as Foxy Grandpa. Si put his finger to his lips.

"He's in the W.C.," said Si, almost inaudibly, laughing without a sound.

Carl kept his face wooden, as if he did not know what Si meant; if he could not fool himself, for the moment, he could

at least pretend to Si that he was an invariable gentleman.

At the foot of the stairs stood Mrs. Sherman, waiting, it seemed, for him.

"You heard, Carl," she said, straightaway, "you'll get the loan."

Carl only nodded, and said thank you. No need to tell the old lady that there was no longer any issue over the loan, or indeed that the whole fight had been about nothing since all the issues had been settled earlier by the people involved.

"You're a good boy, Carl," said Mrs. Sherman, either out of the blue or because she had read his mind.

Carl started upstairs and suddenly the heavy glasses on the gold-starred black tray beamed and sparkled through the tears that came into his eyes. The fight had been about nothing, every issue—but one—was settled, and all logic had been on Joe's side except the grand logic of good against evil. College words! Carl tried to mock himself for his grandiose summing up, but he thought it was the finest fight he had ever heard.

Claudie was standing before the mirror patting powder on her face. Her eyes were still red, but she spoke quietly.

"I never found out just what Joe took," she said.

"You don't have to tell me," said Carl.

"Oh, why not?" said Claudie. She told him the story fast, moving the brushes, combs, buttonhook, photographs on the bureau while she talked, sometimes looking at Carl in the mirror and back to the ordered litter, silver, ivory, glass, lace and embroidery. One night in town, when she was just a kid, she got a bad sore throat and carried on till ma said she could sleep in the little room in the extension down the hall from her parents' bedroom. She was asleep when the racket woke her up, very late it must have been, and she crept down and overheard a terrible row.—"I know I act so fine," said Claudie, "but sometimes everybody listens, I don't care who you are." "Yes," said Carl.—She made out that pa had caught Joe stealing from him, and it must have been going on for some time, not at home but at business. Pa was going to throw Joe out, out of the house, out of the family, and ma was battling for Joe. Ma

won, of course, and it looked as though Joe must have behaved himself after that. "Why shouldn't he?" said Claudie. "He's so damn rich why shouldn't he be honest now?" She began to cry again. "Joe came in while they were fighting, and he said he felt like killing himself, and you know what pa said? Pa said, 'That's a very good idea.' "

She sobbed out loud once, and Carl put his arms around her and hugged her.

"Here, you have a drink, and forget it. It's all over now. The pin is bended and the story is ended."

Claudie took the glass.

"Yes," she said.

"You can certainly keep your mouth shut when you want to," said Carl. "Does anyone else know about this?"

"I always thought Si knew," said Claudie. "No one else."

"Yes, Si—" said Carl. For a moment he felt almost sorry for Joe, and, in any case—what do you know about that! he thought—he was actually happy, and no more confused than was human. He lifted his glass. "All right, darling. *L'chaym.*"

The Nathans drank to life.

Mrs. Sherman went out on the front porch. She saw the little girls dodging around the edge of the privet at the entrance to the drive.

"You kids."

Babs and Judy turned, looking guilty. They had been watching Uncle Joe walk away alone in the heat of midday, bareheaded, holding his Panama hat at his side.

"Granma gave it to him," Babs had whispered. "He got it from granma this time."

"He still has all that money," Judy whispered back. "Yes, granma?"

"You can each have a whole soft-shell crab for dinner," said Mrs. Sherman. Then, before Babs and Judy could express their pleasure at not being short-changed on crabs, granma clutched her side, gave a loud groan, and everyone in the household came running to help her.

Emma phoned the doctor.

"She's got a gallstone attack," said Emma. "I could see it coming."

"Have one of the girls make a linseed poultice," said Dr. Liebmann. "I'll be right over."

Mrs. Sherman, giving in at last to the pain she was now free to accept, disrupted the Sunday so that, for those who had overheard what had passed between her and Joe, all could be forgotten, or stuffed into a cupboard of the mind with other facts not made for daily nourishment. Life could go on, in the quiet Mrs. Sherman's illness imposed. The little girls and Davie went to the beach with their fathers, tiptoed into the dining room for their supper, and were allowed to shift the ball bearings in Judy's puzzle between bites, since that kept them quiet. Both tipped together, and, rigid, looked into the square of glass.

"Babs!"

"Oh!" said Babs.

"We got it."

Judy bore the puzzle to the sideboard, moving almost imperceptibly, so as not to jar the ball bearings loose. Both little girls looked down at the puzzle solved, with every ball bearing in its place under the glass. After an instant of wonder they were bored; they ran out to the stable to find Morton.

39

Mr. Beck, carrying his small black bag, came round the circle of hydrangeas Monday morning on the dot of seven-thirty as usual. He nodded to the paper boy and stepped back against the hydrangeas to let the boy on his bicycle go by. The flowers were huge now, tinged with pink, ready for Mrs. Sherman to garner and bring back to set before the gas-log in her New York parlor. Ah, Time! thought Mr. Beck, beginning a complicated Russian comment on life which he could not put into English. He went up the porch steps, and Gisela ran round from the kitchen, Morton from the stable, Lena burst out of the front door, to order him to be quiet.

Mr. Beck, bewildered, entered the house and hung his hat as usual on the umbrella coat and hatrack that climbed the wall.

Carl came downstairs with Theo and told Beck that the old lady was laid up.

"I am very sorry to hear," whispered Mr. Beck. "Please give Mrs. Sherman my wishes for her quick recovery."

"Beck?" called Mrs. Sherman from her room, not at all weakly.

"Yes, ma'am?" said Mr. Beck.

"You be back here tomorrow," called Mrs. Sherman. "I'll stay in bed today to humor them."

Mr. Beck climbed halfway up the stairs.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Sherman?" he asked.

Claudie, Minnie, Belle and Emma, in wrappers, eyeglasses, with hair flowing, came out and said "Sh!"

"I'm better," said Mrs. Sherman. "Beck, tell the girl to give you a cup coffee and some *Kuchen*."

"Thank you, Mrs. Sherman," said Mr. Beck. He retired to drink his coffee respectfully from a corner of the dining room table. He sat far out from the table, as if to take off should any rightful owner appear, and his concern for Mrs. Sherman, modified by the strength of her voice, was mingled with appreciation of his glimpse of Belle Hoffman's blooming good looks. The coffee cake was delicious, too. Mr. Beck, his mouth full of cake, suddenly lost appetite thinking that Mrs. Sherman was sick and old: what was he doing enjoying himself?

A sound in the hall made him look up. Mr. Lawrence Sherman, looking too pale, was making for the door. Mr. Beck's spirits became muggier; he swallowed what was in his mouth with difficulty.

"Larry," called Claudie.

Larry swung round towards the stair well.

"Yes?"

"Ma says to leave the office early this first day. She'll expect you on the three o'clock. Morton will be at the depot for you."

Beck saw Mr. Lawrence smile.

"Ma," he called, "I'll be on that train. Take it easy now. Goodby, ma, Claudie."

Mr. Si Sherman came downstairs, immaculate in the old tradition, wing collar, pale gray tie, vest piped in white. He was round everywhere, and bouncy as one balloon atop another; he stopped in the dining room doorway and advised Mr. Beck to cheer up, things could always be worse.

Mr. Beck thought another Russian thought, and listened to Mr. Si tell Larry to wait for him, kid, they'd take on Joe together. The screen door whined and banged behind them. Mr. Beck finished his coffee, put the cup and saucer in the plate that had held his cake, and carried them to the sideboard. He stopped to look at the solved puzzle. He did not intend to

touch it; he merely meant to get closer to the ball bearings all in place—an impossibility, no?—but his oppressive mood made him awkward, and voices from upstairs startled him. The voices were raised to an everyday pitch. Mr. Beck's hand hit the top of the sideboard, and, at the touch, all the ball bearings rolled loose.

"Minnie," said Claudie, upstairs, "if you want to read my mail just ask for it. Don't snoop."

"I didn't mean anything wrong. I thought there might be a card from Flora—"

The two other sisters joined the discussion.

"Quiet!" called the old lady.

Mr. Beck, reassured, plucked his hat from the stand and took his departure.